



# How Are California School Districts Planning for Universal Prekindergarten?

Results From a 2022 Survey

Melanie Leung-Gagné, Victoria Wang, Hanna Melnick, and Chris Mauerman

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## Executive Summary

In 2021, California committed to providing universal prekindergarten (UPK) for all 4-year-olds and income-eligible 3-year-olds by 2025–26. UPK includes several early learning programs, including transitional kindergarten (TK), the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), Head Start, and expanded learning opportunities to provide full-day early learning and care. TK is the only UPK program that is free and universally available as part of California’s public education system. Offered by local education agencies (LEAs), TK currently serves all 4-year-olds who turn 5 between September 2 and December 2 and will expand to all 4-year-olds by 2025–26. The legislature also made new investments in CSPP, a program for income-eligible 3- and 4-year-old children. Funding for CSPP is provided by the state through grants to both LEAs and community-based organizations.

This report provides a snapshot of 1,108 LEAs’ initial plans for UPK expansion through the analysis of a survey administered by the California Department of Education in August 2022. Key findings provide insights into LEA plans for service delivery models, facilities and transportation, instruction and assessment, workforce development, school leader development, and technical assistance needs. Notably:

- **Universal prekindergarten delivery models:** Over one third of LEAs plan to expand TK eligibility faster than the legislated rollout schedule. A majority of LEAs report plans to offer TK at all elementary school sites, full-day TK options, and expanded learning and care. California LEAs are planning to implement UPK through various combinations of TK, CSPP, Head Start, and expanded learning programs. There was no common model for how LEAs planned to structure TK classes—while many are planning stand-alone TK classes, many others plan to combine TK with kindergarten, CSPP, and/or locally funded preschool.
- **Facilities and transportation:** About two thirds of LEAs indicate having sufficient facility space to meet projected TK enrollment, though more than half of LEAs intend to update their buildings and grounds to accommodate young learners. Many LEAs also express a need for facilities funding and guidance. Although not required by law, just under half of LEAs plan to provide some form of transportation for TK students.
- **Instruction and assessment:** A majority of LEAs plan to offer English-only instruction with home-language support for multilingual learners and/or dual language programs; however, almost one fifth have no plans to provide language supports. Most LEAs plan to assess children’s learning using locally based assessments in TK and kindergarten, while fewer than a third plan to use established preschool assessments.

- **Workforce development:** Approximately four fifths of LEAs report not having enough qualified staff to teach TK. LEAs plan to use a variety of strategies to develop their TK and CSPP workforce; common strategies include partnering with local institutions of higher education or county offices of education and offering advising.
- **Supporting school leaders:** Almost all LEAs indicate plans to provide principals and site leaders with professional development to prepare them to educate young learners. The most common topics LEAs plan to provide for school leaders focus on academic and social-emotional development, inclusive settings, and curriculum.
- **Technical assistance needs:** LEAs express broad interest across all forms of technical assistance, with highest interest in professional learning.
- **Large district approaches to UPK:** California's four largest districts (educating over 800,000 students, 14% of state enrollment) are planning to roll out TK quickly and comprehensively. All plan to offer early admittance TK, full-day TK, and dual language programs, and they all plan to use established early childhood assessments. However, all indicate a need for more qualified TK teachers and plan to partner with local institutions of higher education. Additionally, the four large districts plan to maintain or expand other UPK options such as CSPP.

These findings may help policymakers and practitioners identify areas for additional investments and supports during UPK implementation, although we note several data limitations and caution that initial UPK plans may have shifted over the course of the 2022–23 school year. As California moves forward with the expansion of universal prekindergarten, more research and data collection will be needed.



## Introduction

In 2021, California committed to providing universal prekindergarten (UPK) for all 4-year-olds and income-eligible 3-year-olds by 2025–26. UPK encompasses several early learning programs, including transitional kindergarten (TK), the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), Head Start, and expanded learning opportunities to support full-day early learning and care. The largest new investments are in TK, a district-based preschool program. Created in 2010, TK is the only UPK program that is free and universally available as part of California’s public education system, serving all 4-year-olds who turn 5 between September 2 and December 2. Under the new law passed in 2021, TK eligibility is slated to expand to all 4-year-olds by extending the age of eligibility by 2 to 3 additional months each year until 2025–26. The legislature also made new investments in CSPP, a program for income-eligible 3- and 4-year-old children. Funding for CSPP is provided by the state through grants to both local education agencies (LEAs) and community-based organizations.

To support UPK expansion, California’s legislature and administration established the [Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant](#) (UPK P&I Grant) in 2021, with close to \$200 million available to all LEAs, such as school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education, that serve kindergarteners. LEAs may use the funds to support UPK in TK as well as other preschool programs. The 2022 budget added another \$300 million to the UPK P&I Grant program, with funds to be released in 2023. To receive the first UPK P&I Grant allocation, LEAs were required to submit a plan to their governing board by June 2022 articulating how all children in the LEA’s boundaries would have access to full-day learning programs before kindergarten.<sup>1</sup> LEAs were also required to respond to a survey about their UPK plans, which was administered by the California Department of Education in August 2022.

The Learning Policy Institute analyzed the responses to the 2022 UPK P&I Grant survey to better understand LEAs’ plans for UPK implementation.<sup>2</sup> The analyzed data contain responses from 1,108 unduplicated LEAs collected between August and September 2022, including 429 charter schools or charter districts.<sup>3</sup> Just under a quarter of respondents (269) indicated that they developed a joint plan with other LEAs.

This report outlines key findings about LEAs’ initial plans for UPK expansion, including service delivery models, facilities and transportation, instruction and assessment, workforce development, school leader development, and technical assistance needs. We also highlight findings for California’s four largest school districts, which together serve about 14% of the state’s students. (See [Universal Prekindergarten Expansion in California’s Four Largest School Districts](#) on page 15.) Responses were required for all survey items except for the optional technical assistance questions. We note that initial UPK plans may have shifted over the course of the 2022–23 school year. While there are several data limitations to the data due to the structure of the survey, these findings provide a valuable first insight into initial UPK implementation across California and may have implications for future state investments and support.



## Universal Prekindergarten Delivery Models

As local education agencies (LEAs) embark on implementing universal prekindergarten (UPK), they need to make several decisions that will impact students' access and experience, including what programs to offer and when, how long the school day should be, and whether to offer expanded learning. All public LEAs are required to offer transitional kindergarten (TK);<sup>4</sup> offering the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) and Head Start is optional. Currently, 300 out of California's 677 CSPP contracts are held by school districts, and 47 school districts hold Head Start contracts.<sup>5</sup> LEAs offering CSPP and Head Start are encouraged, but not required, to partner with community-based providers.<sup>6</sup>

Overall, the survey responses indicate that more than a third of LEAs plan to expand transitional kindergarten eligibility faster than the legislated rollout schedule, and the majority plan to offer full-day TK or offer TK at all elementary sites. LEAs are also planning to implement universal prekindergarten through various combinations of TK, CSPP, Head Start, and expanded learning programs. There was no common model for how LEAs planned to structure TK classes—while many are planning stand-alone TK classes, many others plan to combine TK with kindergarten, CSPP, and/or locally funded preschool.

### How Many LEAs Plan to Offer Early Admittance Transitional Kindergarten?

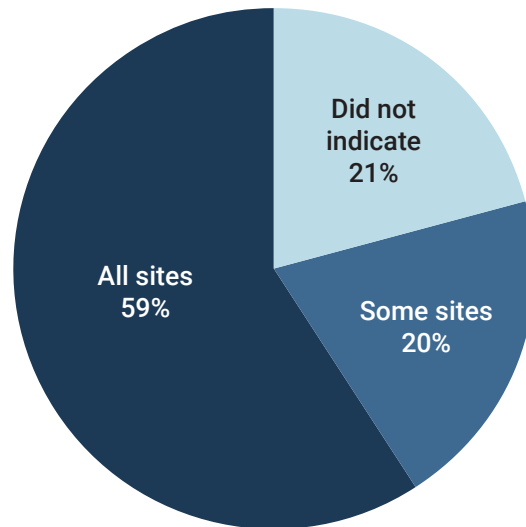
California's rollout of universal transitional kindergarten will expand children's age eligibility gradually each year until all 4-year-olds are eligible in the 2025–26 school year. In the 2022–23 school year, only children who turn 5 between September and February are eligible for full state funding for TK.<sup>7</sup> LEAs have the option of offering early admittance TK (ETK), allowing children to enroll before they are age-eligible; however, the LEA must cover the cost of educating ETK students until their 5th birthday. LEAs have discretion over who is eligible for ETK and may expand access to all 4-year-olds or a subset—such as those who qualify based on age or family income. In the survey, LEAs were asked about their plans to expand eligibility faster than the legislated rollout schedule. For the 2022–23 school year:

- More than a third of LEAs (39%) reported plans to offer ETK.<sup>8</sup>
- About one third (34%) did not plan to offer ETK, although a small percentage plan to begin offering ETK in 2023–24 (2%) or 2024–25 (1%).
- About one quarter (27%) were unsure of their plans to offer ETK.

## Where Are LEAs Offering Transitional Kindergarten?

Research shows that children are more likely to enroll in TK when it is offered at the school where they will attend kindergarten, suggesting the benefits of offering TK at all elementary school sites.<sup>9</sup> The survey findings indicate that most LEAs (59%) plan to offer TK at all sites offering kindergarten, and a fifth (20%) plan to offer TK at some of their sites. The remainder did not indicate their site plans.<sup>10</sup> (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1**  
**Transitional Kindergarten Site Offerings**



Notes: The survey item for TK site offerings was a multiple-select question alongside other options regarding TK service delivery models. LEAs that did not select either the “some sites” or “all sites” option and those that selected both options were categorized as “did not indicate.”  $N = 1,108$ ; response rate = 100%.

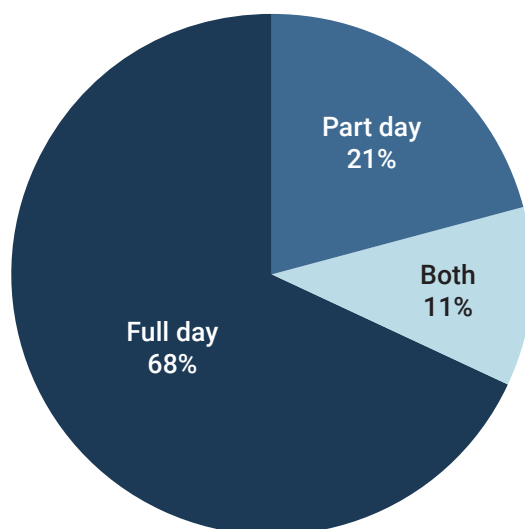
Source: California Department of Education. (2022). *Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Application Survey*.

## How Many LEAs Plan to Offer Full-Day or Part-Day Transitional Kindergarten?

Research suggests that a longer preschool day can have positive impacts on school readiness outcomes.<sup>11</sup> California LEAs have the option of offering a part-day (3–4 hours) or full-day (4 or more hours) program for transitional kindergarten; each of these may be supplemented and lengthened by expanded learning and care programs, discussed below. Nearly 4 in 5 LEAs plan to offer full-day TK at some or all sites: 68% plan to offer only full-day TK, while 11% plan to offer both full- and part-day classes. The remainder (21%) plan to offer only part-day TK classes. (See Figure 2.)

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**Figure 2**  
**Planned Length of Transitional Kindergarten Day**



Notes: “Part day” is defined as 3–4 hours; “full day” is an instructional day of more than 4 hours.  $N = 1,108$ ; response rate = 100%.

Source: California Department of Education. (2022). *Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Application Survey*.

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## How Do LEAs Plan to Offer Universal Prekindergarten?

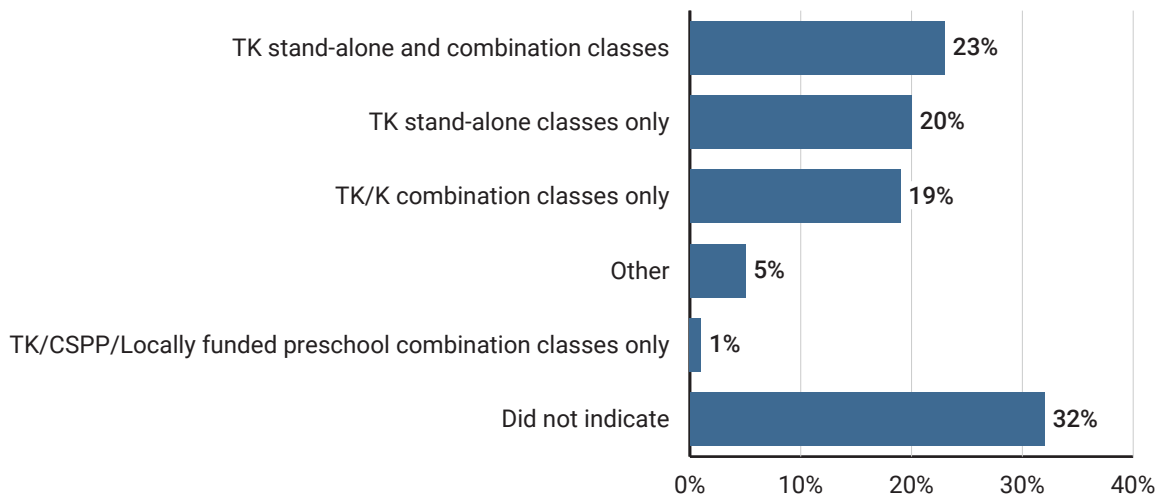
LEAs have discretion in how they plan to form their transitional kindergarten classes to offer prekindergarten to all 4-year-olds. LEAs can offer stand-alone classes, which serve TK students only; or combination classes, which mix TK students with other students, including kindergarteners or CSPP students. TK stand-alone classes have students from a narrower age range and may be more developmentally appropriate than TK/K combination classes: A study comparing TK stand-alone and TK/K combination classes found stand-alone classes to spend more time on child-directed activities, social and emotional learning, physical activity, music, and art.<sup>12</sup>

Some LEAs may choose to combine TK students with other students because of staffing or facility limitations, or because they have too few TK students to form a stand-alone classroom. In combination classes, LEAs have to meet the more stringent legislative requirements for the student groups that are mixed, including for teacher qualifications, class size, and facility standards.

In the survey, LEAs were asked about their UPK service delivery plans in one multiple-select survey question, which included response options on TK as well as CSPP and Head Start. We grouped responses into mutually exclusive categories to understand LEAs’ specific TK service delivery models (see Figure 3).<sup>13</sup> Note that nearly a third of respondents did not indicate their TK delivery model, so the percentage of LEAs adopting each delivery model is likely higher.<sup>14</sup>

- Nearly a quarter of LEAs (23%) indicate that they will offer TK in multiple models, including stand-alone TK classes and combination classes with kindergarten, CSPP, or Head Start.
- A fifth of LEAs (20%) plan to offer only TK stand-alone classes.
- About one fifth of LEAs (19%) plan to offer TK only through combination classes with kindergarten.
- Very few LEAs (1%) plan to offer TK only through combination classes with CSPP or a locally funded preschool.
- Five percent of LEAs selected the “other” option, suggesting that they plan to offer TK through a way other than stand-alone or combination classes. Three quarters of these LEAs are charter schools or districts; several plan to offer TK through independent study or home school support.

**Figure 3**  
**Transitional Kindergarten Service Delivery Models**



Notes: This survey item on UPK service delivery models was a multiple-select question that included other unrelated options about TK site offerings. This may have led to a significant number of non-responses, as many respondents did not select options that were about TK service delivery models—these LEAs were categorized as “did not indicate.” The majority of LEAs that selected “other” were charters planning to offer TK via independent study or home school support. *N* = 1,108; response rate = 99.7%. CSPP stands for California State Preschool Program.

Source: California Department of Education. (2022). *Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Application Survey*.

## How Do LEAs Plan to Combine Early Learning Programs With Expanded Learning and Care?

In addition to offering prekindergarten, LEAs are also working to provide families access to expanded learning and care by combining programs with their instructional day. To support more flexible programming, in 2021 the legislature allowed CSPP contractors the option to provide before- and after-school care in coordination with TK to provide full-day programming and care.

In the survey, LEAs were asked to indicate which programs they plan to combine with the TK instructional day, with the option of selecting multiple items.

- The majority of LEAs (81%) plan to offer expanded learning programs on an LEA site. Over half of LEAs (52%) indicated that this was the only channel through which they planned to provide full-day programming.
- About a fifth of LEAs plan to offer expanded learning and care through a CSPP site: 18% on an LEA site and 3% on a community-based organization site.
- About one tenth of LEAs (11%) plan to combine TK with expanded learning programs at a community-based organization, and a similar proportion (10%) plan to do so with locally funded preschool.

## What Are LEAs' Plans for CSPP and Head Start?

As TK expands, the state intends to continue support for CSPP, Head Start, and other early learning programs to ensure that every 4-year-old and income-eligible 3-year-olds have access to quality early learning.<sup>15</sup> CSPP and Head Start are publicly funded preschool programs for children who qualify based on family income or other factors; CSPP serves 3- and 4-year-olds, while Head Start is available for children ages 3 through 5.<sup>16</sup> While TK is offered only through LEAs, CSPP and Head Start may be offered through state and federal contracts with public or private institutions, such as community-based organizations. To serve more children, CSPP contractors must apply to expand their contracts. About 290 California school districts held a CSPP contract in 2021.<sup>17</sup>

In the survey, all LEAs were asked about their plans for CSPP. According to their responses:

- Most LEAs (70%) do not plan to begin or expand a CSPP contract in future years.
- About one tenth of LEAs have applied to increase their CSPP offerings in 2022–23; 7% of LEAs applied to expand an existing CSPP contract and 4% applied for a new contract.
- About 17% of LEAs indicate that they would begin or expand a CSPP contract if funding is appropriated by the legislature.
- 24 LEAs (2%) plan to reduce CSPP services in the coming years.

Less than one tenth of LEAs (8%) reported plans to offer Head Start stand-alone classes as part of their UPK expansion.

Given the state's interest in serving more 3-year-old children through CSPP and Head Start, it is encouraging that as TK expands, few LEAs plan to reduce CSPP services, and a small percentage have applied to expand or begin a new CSPP contract. However, it will be important for state policymakers to continue to monitor these contracts in future years given the complexity of expanding multiple publicly funded programs at once.



## Facilities and Transportation

Local education agencies were surveyed about their facilities needs for universal prekindergarten, as well as about their plans to provide transportation in transitional kindergarten. The majority of LEAs (73%) indicated that they have sufficient facility space to meet projected TK enrollment, although facilities are a top concern for others. Most LEAs do not plan to offer transportation to TK, which may have implications for accessibility.

### How Many LEAs Plan to Update Their Facilities?

The expansion of TK will require LEAs to update or add developmentally appropriate facilities such as classrooms, bathrooms, and play areas. More than half of LEAs (53%) intend to update their buildings and grounds, such as land and building size or turf, paved, or apparatus areas, to accommodate young learners.

Over a third of LEAs (35%) indicate that their Facilities Master Plans, which describe LEAs' facilities and strategies to meet state requirements,<sup>18</sup> do not adequately address the need for UPK programming. In addition, over a quarter of LEAs (27%) report that they do not have adequate classroom space to meet TK projected enrollment and a similar number (also 27%) report that their classroom space does not meet California kindergarten standards. A smaller portion of LEAs (16%) indicate that their classrooms do not contain necessary adaptive equipment and technology to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities.

In an optional, open-ended question to LEAs regarding implementation challenges and technical assistance needs, respondents most often cited needing support for facilities, particularly a need for guidance on facilities expansion or how to tailor spaces for early learners.<sup>19</sup> LEA respondents also discussed needing funding for both facilities and general UPK implementation, with a few LEAs noting challenges for districts that receive less state funding, such as "basic aid" districts that rely on local property taxes rather than the state's school funding formula.

### How Many LEAs Plan to Offer Transportation for Students?

LEAs in California are not required to provide transportation for all students, although federal law requires public transportation for certain students, including students with disabilities and students experiencing homelessness.<sup>20</sup> Despite the lack of a requirement, almost half of LEAs (44%) plan to provide some form of transportation for their TK students. Among LEAs that plan to provide transportation for TK:

- Almost all (95%) plan to provide transportation to and from the TK program.
- Nearly a fifth (18%) plan to provide transportation to an expanded learning and care program on another LEA site.
- Ten percent plan to provide transportation to an expanded learning and care program on a non-LEA site, such as a community-based organization that operates a preschool program.

## Instruction and Assessment

Local education agencies were surveyed about their plans for universal prekindergarten instruction, including language models, social and emotional learning, inclusive education, and assessments. Most LEAs plan to offer English-only transitional kindergarten programs with home-language support and/or dual language programs, while some do not plan to offer language supports. The majority of LEAs also cited plans to support inclusive, developmentally appropriate learning environments. Finally, most LEAs plan to assess children's learning using locally based assessments in TK, while fewer plan to use established preschool assessments.

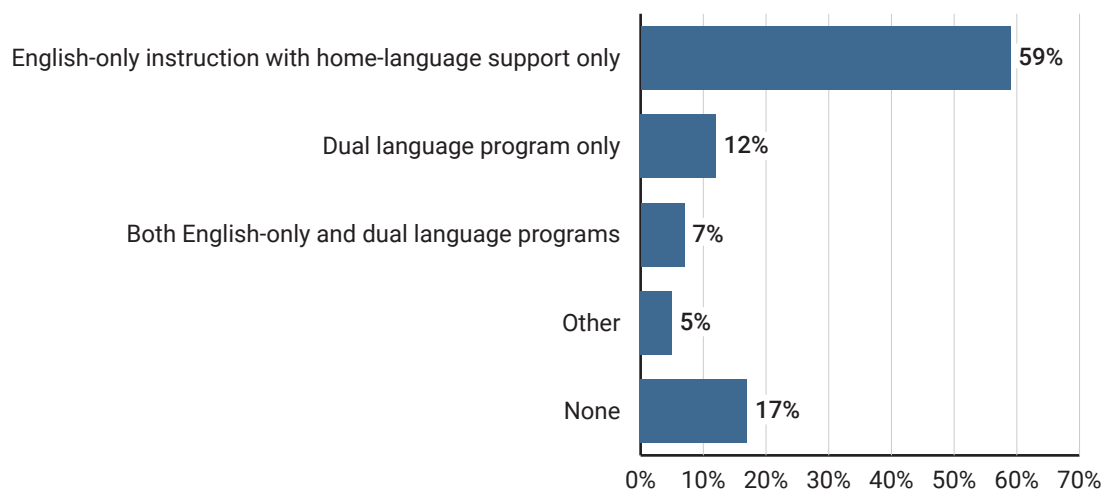
### How Do LEAs Plan to Support Multilingual Learners?

Two fifths (40%) of California public school students speak multiple languages, and nearly 30% of California's TK students are classified as English learners.<sup>21</sup> Supporting young children's home language development is of critical importance for their later development.<sup>22</sup> The survey asked LEAs to indicate which language models they planned to use for TK to support multilingual learners; respondents were able to select multiple options.<sup>23</sup> Most LEAs (59%) only plan to offer English-only instruction with home-language support; 12% plan to offer only dual language programs; and 7% of LEAs plan to offer a mix of English-only instruction and dual language programs. (See Figure 4.)

Some LEAs (5%) selected "other" and provided written responses. Many of these LEAs mentioned that they were providing English-only instruction with varying degrees of English language development supports for students. Several LEAs indicated that they were in the process of developing dual language programs, which they plan to implement in future years.

One in six LEAs (17%) have no plans to provide either home-language support or a dual language program. These LEAs have an average English learner enrollment of 13%, which is lower than the state average. However, some of these LEAs still have significant English learner enrollment; 41% of LEAs that indicated not planning to offer any home-language support or dual language program have English learners that make up a third or more of their student population.

**Figure 4**  
**Transitional Kindergarten Language Models**



Notes: LEAs were allowed to select multiple items in this survey question: Most LEAs (91%) selected only one response, while 9% selected two or three responses. *N* = 1,108; response rate = 99.7%.

Source: California Department of Education. (2022). *Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Application Survey*.

## How Do LEAs Plan to Develop Supportive Learning Environments?

Supportive, developmentally appropriate learning environments are essential for preschoolers' ability to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.<sup>24</sup> Most LEAs plan to use several strategies to create inclusive, developmentally supportive environments for their early learners. The most common strategies that LEAs cited to develop early learners' social and emotional learning and executive function skills were:

- Design developmentally appropriate learning environments for individual and group activities (80%)
- Utilize play-based learning (79%)
- Develop targeted lesson plans or curriculum for social and emotional learning (71%)

Individualized learning experiences and inclusive practices are particularly important for children with special needs. Plans to support children with disabilities include:

- Provide adaptations to instructional materials (80%)
- Provide specialized services in the classroom (68%)
- Provide additional staff to support instruction (66%)
- Implement Universal Design for Learning (64%)

## How Are LEAs Planning for Early Childhood Assessments?

Strong and aligned early childhood assessment systems can support developmentally appropriate learning experiences by providing information to guide early childhood instruction and support whole child development.<sup>25</sup> LEAs were asked about the types of assessments they plan to use in TK or kindergarten. The most cited assessments are:

- LEA-based grade-level benchmarks and report cards (69%)
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) (29%)
- Other<sup>26</sup> (29%)
- Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) (13%)

In a separate survey item about professional development, almost all LEAs (93%) indicated that they plan to offer professional development on assessments for TK, CSPP, and/or other early childhood education teachers. Of these LEAs, most (80%) plan to offer professional development on assessments that they plan to use.

While some LEA-based grade-level benchmarks may be appropriate for TK, research suggests that equitable early childhood instruction is different in many ways than assessing older children. LEAs may therefore benefit from guidance on assessment use and how to align TK assessments with assessment tools required in CSPP. The DRDP is an observational tool required in CSPP, and the ASQ is a developmental screener used in many CSPP programs as well.<sup>27</sup>

## Workforce Development

California's expansion of universal prekindergarten will require the recruitment and preparation of thousands of early educators to meet increased student enrollment.<sup>28</sup> In the survey, LEAs were asked to report strategies they plan to use to support candidates in meeting requirements to teach transitional kindergarten and the California State Preschool Program. LEAs plan to use a variety of strategies to develop their TK and CSPP workforce; common strategies include partnering with local institutions of higher education (IHEs) or county offices of education and offering advising. About one fifth of LEAs indicated that they already have enough qualified staff to teach TK.

### How Do LEAs Plan to Develop the Transitional Kindergarten Workforce?

By August 2023, all TK classes receiving state funding are required to be staffed by teachers with 24 units of coursework in early childhood education (ECE) or child development, a Child Development Teacher Permit, or equivalent experience in addition to holding a valid teaching credential.<sup>29</sup> To qualify to teach TK, many current preschool teachers would therefore have to obtain a teaching credential and current elementary school teachers would have to complete ECE coursework or equivalent experience. LEAs were surveyed on strategies they plan to use in developing their TK workforce.

### Obtaining a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential

LEAs were surveyed on a wide variety of strategies they plan to employ to support candidates in earning a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential, including strategies to build new workforce pathways and provide direct supports to TK teacher candidates.<sup>30</sup> LEAs were also able to select an option stating they would use none of the listed strategies because they had enough TK teachers with a Multiple Subject credential. About a fifth of LEAs surveyed (23%) selected this option, reporting that they had enough Multiple Subject credential holders.

To develop accessible pathways for prospective TK teachers seeking a Multiple Subject credential, many LEAs reported plans to partner with other organizations, including teacher preparation programs, county offices of education, and high schools:

- Partner with IHEs or their county offices of education to support Multiple Subject credential candidates (59%)
- Join an existing intern preparation program to recruit and prepare teachers (27%)
- Establish pathways for high school students through clubs, apprenticeships, or other early recruitment opportunities (16%)

- Collaborate with IHEs to offer coursework at an LEA site during times that work for candidates (11%)
- Join an existing apprenticeship cohort program (8%)
- Partner with the California Center on Careers (7%)

To directly support prospective TK teachers, some LEAs plan to use the following strategies to communicate information, offer financial assistance, or provide additional services:

- Provide advising on credential requirements (50%)
- Partner with a county office of education to provide other services to Multiple Subject credential candidates (31%)
- Provide information on scholarship and grant opportunities to CSPP and other staff interested in providing expanded learning and care services (26%)
- Offer a stipend for costs associated with obtaining a Multiple Subject credential (22%)
- Partner with a local IHE to provide other services to candidates seeking a Multiple Subject credential (16%)

### **Completing ECE coursework and obtaining ECE experience**

In addition to supporting TK teacher candidates in obtaining Multiple Subject credentials, LEAs also plan to apply a variety of strategies to support teachers in earning the 24 units of early childhood coursework or equivalent that will soon be required of state-funded TK teachers. LEAs were again able to select an option stating they would use none of these strategies because they had enough TK teachers who met legislative requirements to receive TK funding: One fifth of LEAs (21%) selected this option.

The strategies LEAs reported for building candidate pathways for ECE coursework and experience included:

- Partner with a local IHE to offer coursework (40%)
- Partner with an IHE or county office of education to operate cohort models (36%)
- Apply for workforce development funding and grant opportunities (22%)

LEAs' reported plans to provide direct supports for TK candidates' completion of ECE coursework and experience included:

- Provide advising (55%)
- Provide information on scholarship and grant opportunities (45%)



- Develop or work with a mentorship program (34%)
- Provide a stipend for costs associated with obtaining credit-based coursework or a degree (29%)
- Provide a stipend for costs associated with obtaining a Child Development Teacher Permit (27%)
- Offer unit-bearing IHE coursework at an LEA site during times that work for candidates (10%)

## How Do LEAs Plan to Develop the CSPP Workforce?

CSPP teachers are required to have a Child Development Teacher Permit issued by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, which requires at least 24 units of ECE, 16 units of general education, and 175 days of teaching experience.<sup>31</sup> All LEAs were surveyed about their plans to support the CSPP workforce and their strategies to develop that workforce and increase the number of CSPP teachers with a Child Development Teacher Permit or higher. Since many of these LEAs do not employ CSPP teachers, this section focuses on responses from the 256 LEAs that indicated in the survey that they planned to offer CSPP.<sup>32</sup>

The strategies that LEAs report for developing pathways to a Child Development Teacher Permit include<sup>33</sup>:

- Partner with a local IHE to offer coursework (53%)
- Partner with an IHE or county office of education to operate cohort models (47%)
- Apply for workforce development funding and grant opportunities (37%)

LEAs that offer CSPP also plan to offer supports for candidates seeking a Child Development Teacher Permit, with the following strategies to provide information and resources cited most often:

- Provide advising (71%)
- Provide information on scholarship and grant opportunities (65%)
- Provide a stipend for costs associated with obtaining a Child Development Teacher Permit (38%)
- Provide a stipend for costs associated with obtaining credit-based coursework (35%)
- Offer coursework at an LEA site during times that work for teachers (18%)

## Supporting School Leaders

Principals and other leaders who oversee early childhood education programs need to have specialized knowledge and skills to effectively lead early learning programs. Understanding early childhood development can prepare school leaders to foster collaboration and instructional alignment from preschool to 3rd grade.<sup>34</sup> Many California administrators do not have expertise specific to early learning and may therefore benefit from targeted professional development.<sup>35</sup> The survey asked local education agencies about their plans to offer professional development for site leaders and principals. The most common planned professional development topics were:

- Children’s literacy and language development (66%)
- Children’s social-emotional development (66%)
- Serving children with disabilities in inclusive settings (59%)
- Curriculum selection and implementation (57%)
- Children’s mathematics and science development (56%)

A small percentage of LEAs (5%) do not plan to offer professional development for site leaders and principals.

### Universal Prekindergarten Expansion in California’s Four Largest School Districts

Over 800,000 students, approximately 14% of California’s students, are served by the state’s four largest school districts: Los Angeles Unified School District, San Diego Unified School District, Fresno Unified School District, and Long Beach Unified School District. These districts have been committed to universal prekindergarten for several years, and due to their size, may have greater financial and staffing capacity for UPK implementation compared to smaller local education agencies. This section provides additional insights into their plans for expansion, which will affect a large portion of California’s young learners.

#### *Universal prekindergarten delivery models*

The four largest districts in the state are planning to roll out transitional kindergarten quickly and comprehensively. Notably:

- **All four districts plan to offer early admittance TK (ETK).** The four districts plan to expand TK eligibility faster than the legislated rollout. Los Angeles and Fresno already offer ETK and plan to continue; Long Beach planned to begin offering ETK in the 2022–23 school year; and San Diego plans to begin offering ETK in 2023–24.

- **All plan to offer full-day TK.** Three of the four districts plan to offer only full-day TK; San Diego plans to offer both full-day and part-day. All four districts plan to offer TK at all sites offering kindergarten.
- **Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Fresno plan to offer stand-alone TK classes.** While Fresno plans to offer only stand-alone TK classes at all sites, Los Angeles plans to also run TK/K combination classes, and Long Beach plans to combine some TK classes with the California State Preschool Program. The survey did not allow LEAs to indicate what proportion of sites will be offering stand-alone versus combination classes. San Diego indicated that it planned to offer TK in combination with locally funded preschool only.
- **All plan to maintain or grow state preschool.** All four districts plan to maintain their existing CSPP offerings: Long Beach applied to expand its CSPP contract in the 2022–23 school year, and the rest plan to apply to expand their CSPP contracts in future years if funding is appropriated by the legislature.

### *Instruction and assessment*

These four districts are more likely than others in the state to offer instructional supports for dual language learners and use early childhood assessments in TK that are aligned to CSPP. Specifically:

- **All four districts plan to offer a dual language program in TK.** Additionally, Fresno and Long Beach plan to offer English-only instruction with home-language support.
- **All plan to use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) assessment in transitional kindergarten or kindergarten.** In addition to the DRDP, Los Angeles and Long Beach indicated plans to use LEA-based grade-level benchmarks and report cards and other assessments; for example, Long Beach uses the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and Los Angeles uses the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). San Diego and Long Beach plan to use the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ).

### *Workforce development*

As with most LEAs, none of the four largest districts indicated having a sufficient supply of qualified TK teachers. To build the supply of credentialed TK teachers and permitted CSPP teachers, they plan the following:

- **All four districts plan to partner with local institutions of higher education.** Three of the four districts additionally intend to build from the Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing Program or Teacher Residency Grant Program, provide information on scholarship and grant opportunities to CSPP and other staff interested in providing expanded learning and care, and provide advising to help teachers complete early childhood education coursework.

### **Supporting school leaders**

These four largest districts plan to implement early childhood professional learning for site leaders and school principals as follows:

- **Los Angeles, Fresno, and Long Beach plan to offer a wide variety of early childhood professional learning for site leaders and principals.** Topics include administration and use of child assessments to inform instruction, support for multilingual learners, implicit bias and culturally and linguistically responsive practices (Los Angeles and Long Beach), and serving children with disabilities (Los Angeles and Fresno).
- **Los Angeles, Fresno, and San Diego plan to offer professional learning on child development topics aligned with the California Preschool Learning Foundations.** These topics include literacy and language development (Los Angeles and Fresno), mathematics and science development (Los Angeles and San Diego), and social-emotional development (Los Angeles and Fresno).

Source: California Department of Education. *Largest and smallest public school districts*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/ceflargesmalldist.asp> (accessed 11/29/22).

## Technical Assistance Needs

The Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant survey included optional questions for local education agencies to indicate what supports they need to implement an effective UPK program. The California Department of Education offered LEAs multiple potential options for technical assistance in the following categories: program planning; partnerships; facilities; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; workforce recruitment and development; and professional development. These survey questions were optional, with 56–64% of LEAs responding.

Among the LEAs that responded, there was broad interest across the board for many of the technical assistance options. Table 1 lists the most common technical assistance that LEAs requested, many of which are related to professional learning.

**Table 1**  
**Technical Assistance Needs Commonly Identified by LEAs**

| Type of technical assistance   | % LEAs |
|--|--------|
| Professional learning opportunities on children’s literacy and language development  | 42%    |
| Supports for workshops with external professional development providers  | 40%    |
| Professional learning opportunities on children’s social-emotional development   | 40%    |
| Professional learning opportunities on children’s math and science development   | 38%    |
| Guidance on how to modify an elementary school classroom to serve young children   | 38%    |
| Creating professional learning opportunities to provide site leaders with more early childhood knowledge   | 37%    |
| Supports for providing coaching and mentoring  | 36%    |
| Strategies to encourage purposeful play, choice, social interactions, and collaboration  | 36%    |
| Meeting the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program requirements through different models of extended learning and care, including models of blending and layering funding to support the 9-hour day and ensuring developmentally informed environments for young children | 36%    |
| Strategies to creating inclusive classrooms, including implementing Universal Design for Learning  | 36%    |

Notes: Survey items related to technical assistance are optional. *N* = 1,108; response rates ranged from 56% to 64%.  
Source: Source: California Department of Education. (2022). *Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Application Survey*.

## Limitations and Implications

The results of the Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant survey provide an overview of how local education agencies are approaching universal prekindergarten expansion across California. These findings may help policymakers and practitioners identify areas for additional investments and supports during UPK implementation.

Given the limitations of the data, several cautions should be observed in interpreting the results. First, the LEAs are responding to questions about their intended plans, and these plans are subject to change as the LEAs begin UPK implementation. Therefore, what LEAs report in the survey may be different from what they actually implement. Additionally, LEA applications may have been filled out by a single person, who may not have access to all the information requested in the survey, which covers a wide range of early childhood education programs and topics. This could lead to missing or inaccurate information in the survey responses. The survey items also do not address differences between sites within an LEA, which makes it difficult to gauge the extent to which various plans and programs may be implemented; for example, while some LEAs may have indicated plans to offer dual language programs generally, it is unclear how many sites will offer a dual language program. More follow-up research and data collection on what LEAs are doing will be needed to fully understand the implementation of UPK across California.

As California moves forward with the expansion of UPK, it is crucial to monitor implementation to ensure that all young children in the state have access to high-quality early education. Developing robust systems and methods for quality data collection at both state and local levels, especially from multiple perspectives within the early learning and care systems, can answer additional questions that policymakers, practitioners, and community members have about the impact of UPK expansion and implementation.



## Endnotes

1. Local education agencies were allowed to complete these plans as part of a consortium. See: California Department of Education. (2022, May 31). *First apportionment for the Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant, fiscal year 2021–22*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r2/upkpifirstletterapport21.asp>
2. The California Department of Education also administered a separate survey to county offices of education, not analyzed here.
3. There were 1,140 initial surveys received from the UPK Planning and Implementation grants; we found 32 duplicates. Among the LEAs that submitted two responses, 11 provided identical answers and 21 provided different answers. For the latter group, we kept the last submitted responses in our analyses. The California Department of Education (CDE) received additional survey responses after September 2022, which are not included in this analysis. For the most recent CDE report on these responses, see: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr23/documents/jan23item10a3.docx>
4. All public LEAs except charter schools are required to offer transitional kindergarten. California Department of Education. (2021). *Universal prekindergarten and charter schools FAQs*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ch/ab131faqs.asp>
5. There were 290 school districts with CSPP contracts as of April 2021. California Department of Education. (2021). *Contractor list by county*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/Contractsbycounty2021.xlsx> (accessed 02/16/23); personal email with Cynthia Yao, Regional Program Manager, Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families (2023, February 23).
6. For more information, see: Melnick, H., Tinubu Ali, T., Gardner, M., Maier, A., & Wechsler, M. (2017). *Understanding California's early care and education system*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/understanding-californias-early-care-education-system-report>
7. California Education Code § 48000(c)(1) (2022).
8. Among the LEAs planning to offer early admittance TK (ETK) in the 2022–23 school year, as TK eligibility expands each subsequent year, the majority intend to continue offering ETK in 2023–24 (84%) and 2024–25 (79%).
9. Hill, L., & Prunty, E. (2022). *Setting the stage for universal preschool: Is transitional kindergarten serving students equitably?* Public Policy Institute of California. <https://www.ppic.org/?show-pdf=true&docraptor=true&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ppic.org%2Fpublication%2Fsetting-the-stage-for-universal-preschool%2F>
10. The survey item for TK site offerings was a multiple-select question alongside other options regarding TK service delivery models. LEAs that did not select either the “some sites” or “all sites” option and those that selected both options were categorized as “did not indicate.”
11. Wasik, B., & Snell, E. (2015). *Synthesis of preschool dosage: Unpacking how quantity, quality, and content impact child outcomes* [White paper]. Temple University; Reynolds, A. J., Richardson, B. A., & Hayakawa, M. (2014). Association of a full-day versus part-day preschool intervention with school readiness, attendance, and parent involvement. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 312(20). <https://www.doi.org/10.1001/jama.2014.15376>
12. Manship, K., Holod, A., Quick, H., Ogut, B., Brodziak de los Reyes, I., ... Anderson, E. (2017). *The impact of transitional kindergarten on California students: Final report from the study of California's Transitional Kindergarten Program*. American Institutes for Research. <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/Transitional-Kindergarten-Final-Report-June-2017-rev.pdf>
13. The question on TK service delivery models also included answer choices regarding TK site offerings; consequently, many respondents did not indicate their specific TK delivery model. Since all LEAs are required to offer transitional kindergarten, those that selected response options only about CSPP and Head Start were categorized as “did not indicate.”
14. The non-response rate was high for this item because the survey asked about both TK site offerings and delivery models in a single question; many LEAs selected only responses relevant to site offerings.

15. California Health and Human Service Agency. (2020). *Master Plan for Early Learning and Care: Making California for all kids*. <https://cdn-west-prod-chhs-01.dsh.ca.gov/chhs/uploads/2020/12/01104743/Master-Plan-for-Early-Learning-and-Care-Making-California-For-All-Kids-FINAL.pdf>; Office of Head Start. (2022). *Head Start services*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/head-start#:~:text=Head%20Start%20preschool%20services%20work,many%20also%20serve%20expectant%20families>
16. California Department of Education. (2021). *Program requirements for California State Preschool Program: Fiscal year 2021–22*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/cd/documents/cspp2122.docx>; Administration of Children and Families. (2023). *Poverty guidelines and determining eligibility for participation in Head Start programs*. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/ersea/article/poverty-guidelines-determining-eligibility-participation-head-start-programs>
17. California Department of Education. (2021). *Contractor list by county*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/Contractsbycounty2021.xlsx> (accessed 02/16/23).
18. 21st Century School Fund. (2011). *PK–12 Public Educational Facilities Master Plan evaluation guide*. <http://www.21csf.org/csf-home/Documents/21CSFMFPEvaluationChecklistAugust2011.pdf> (accessed 12/14/22).
19. Among the 1,108 LEAs that applied for the UPK P&I Grant, 141 LEAs responded to the open-ended technical assistance question, and 48 provided meaningful responses. Responses that stated no technical assistance was needed or provided general commentary (e.g., thanking the California Department of Education) were excluded from analysis; “meaningful” responses were those that attempted to answer the question. Respondents included small, medium, and large, as well as urban, suburban, and rural, LEAs. These open-ended responses were thematically analyzed using emergent coding.
20. Legislative Analyst's Office. (2014). *Review of school transportation in California*. <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2014/education/school-transportation/school-transportation-022514.pdf>
21. California Department of Education. (2022). *Facts about English learners in California*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/cefelfacts.asp> (accessed 02/14/23); California Department of Education Data Reporting Office. (2023). *Transitional kindergarten program participation by ethnicity*. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/tkreports/TkReport.aspx> (accessed 03/11/22).
22. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures*. National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24677>
23. Most LEAs (91%) selected only one response, and 9% selected two or three responses.
24. Meloy, B., & Schachner, A. (2019). *Early childhood essentials: A framework for aligning child skills and educator competencies*. Learning Policy Institute.
25. Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Wechsler, M. (2021). *High-quality early childhood assessment: Learning from states' use of kindergarten entry assessments*. Learning Policy Institute; Snow, C. E., & Van Hemel, S. B. (Eds.). (2008). *Early childhood assessment: Why, what, and how*. National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/12446>
26. LEAs that chose “other” were offered a write-in response, and responses varied widely. Some common assessments mentioned were Core Growth, Classroom Assessment Scoring System, Early Childhood Environmental Rating System, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, Educational Software for Guided Instruction, First 5 Siskiyou Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, Fountas & Pinnell, FastBridge, iReady, Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile, Standardized Testing and Reporting, NWEA MAP, mCLASS, and locally developed assessments.
27. Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Wechsler, M. (2021). *High-quality early childhood assessment: Learning from states' use of kindergarten entry assessments*. Learning Policy Institute.
28. Melnick, H., García, E., & Leung-Gagné, M. (2022). *Building a well-qualified transitional kindergarten workforce in California: Needs and opportunities*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/826.674>
29. “Equivalent experience” is defined as professional experience in a classroom setting with preschool-age children meeting the criteria established by the governing board or body of the LEA that is comparable to the 24 units of education. See: California Education Code § 48000(g)(4) (2022). In 2023, these requirements may also be met by holding a PK–3 ECE Specialist Credential. See: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. *PK–3 ECE Specialist Instruction Credential*. <https://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/pk-3-ece-specialist-instruction-credential> (accessed 12/09/22).

30. LEAs were able to select multiple strategies. When asked about strategies to support prospective TK teachers in earning a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential, 32% of LEAs selected only one strategy, 47% selected two to five strategies, and the remainder selected six or more.
31. Teachers may also hold a Child Development Associate Teacher Permit, which requires 12 units of ECE and 50 days of experience, if working toward their teacher permit. See: California Department of Education. (2022). *CSPP staffing qualifications*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/csppstaffqual.asp> (accessed 02/09/23); California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2022). *Child Development Permits (CL-797)*. [https://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/leaflets/child-development-permits-\(cl-797\)](https://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/leaflets/child-development-permits-(cl-797))
32. The survey did not directly ask respondents if their LEA held a CSPP contract. Through a survey item on UPK service delivery models, we identified 256 LEAs that likely offered CSPP; these LEAs indicated that they planned to offer CSPP stand-alone classes or CSPP and TK combination classes. By contrast, 290 LEAs hold California Department of Education contracts. See: California Department of Education. (2021). *Contractor list by county*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/Contractsbycounty2021.xlsx> (accessed 02/16/23).
33. LEAs were able to select multiple strategies. Among the 220 LEAs offering CSPP that selected at least one strategy, over a quarter (28%) selected one or two strategies, over a third (35%) selected three or four strategies, and the remainder selected five or more.
34. Kauerz, K., Ballard, R., Soli, M., & Hagerman, S. (2021). *Leading learning communities: A principal's guide to early learning and the early grades (Pre-K–3rd grade)*. National Association of Elementary School Principals.
35. Stipek, D., et al. (2018). *Getting Down to Facts II: Early childhood education in California*. Stanford University & Policy Analysis for California Education. [https://gettingdowntofacts.com/sites/default/files/2018-09/GDTFII\\_Report\\_Stipek.pdf](https://gettingdowntofacts.com/sites/default/files/2018-09/GDTFII_Report_Stipek.pdf)

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