



BRIEFING

# Universal Prekindergarten in California: Supporting Effective Implementation



Wednesday, March 18, 2026

# Agenda

- Opening Remarks
- Research Presentation
- Local Perspectives on California's Mixed Delivery System
- Colorado's Mixed Delivery System: Lessons for California
- Closing Remarks



# Opening Remarks

Al Muratsuchi | California Assemblymember, District 66



# Research Presentation

**Hanna Melnick** | Senior Policy Advisor and Director of Early Learning Policy, Learning Policy Institute



*I cannot say enough good things about it. ... I'm amazed by how much he learned about reading and stuff, but when he got in the car after school every day, we'd talk about all the playing he did. [...I was] very, very pleased with that experience.*

*–Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Parent*

# What is mixed delivery?

## A system of care that includes:

- Local education agencies (LEAs)
- Head Start
- Child care centers
- Family child care homes
- Family, friend, and neighbor

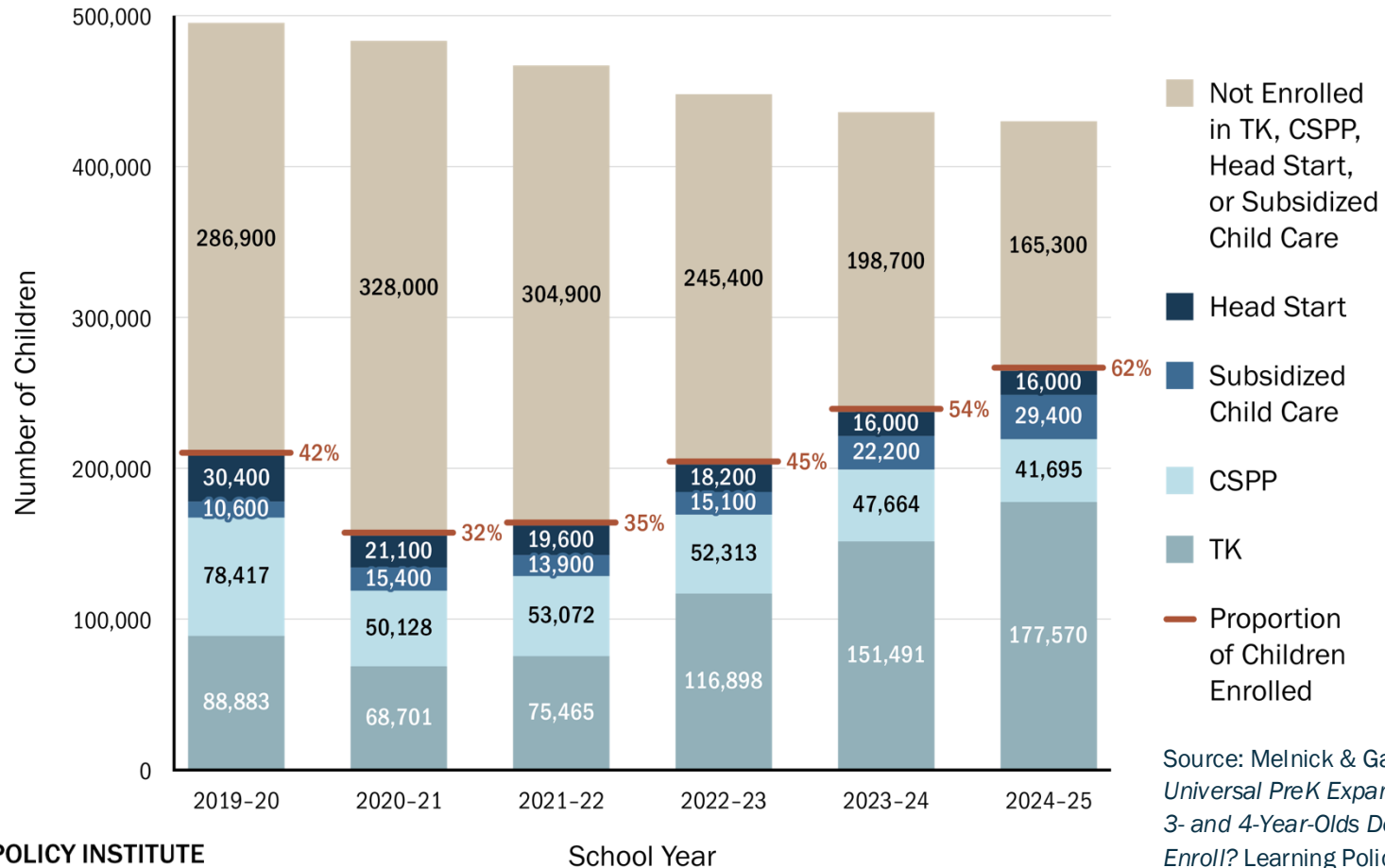
## Benefits:

- Family choice
- Capacity
- Diversity

# California's publicly funded UPK programs

	Age	Income Eligibility	Setting
<b>Transitional Kindergarten</b>	4	None	LEAs
<b>California State Preschool Program</b>	2-4	100% State Median Income	LEAs Centers
<b>Head Start</b>	3-4	100% Federal Poverty Level	LEAs Centers
<b>Subsidized Child Care</b>	0-12	85% State Median Income (+ work requirement)	Centers Family Child Care License-exempt

# Access for 4-year-olds is improving steadily.



Source: Melnick & Garcia. (2026). *Universal PreK Expansion: How Many 3- and 4-Year-Olds Does California Enroll?* Learning Policy Institute. 8

# California enrolls many 3-year-olds, but has room to grow

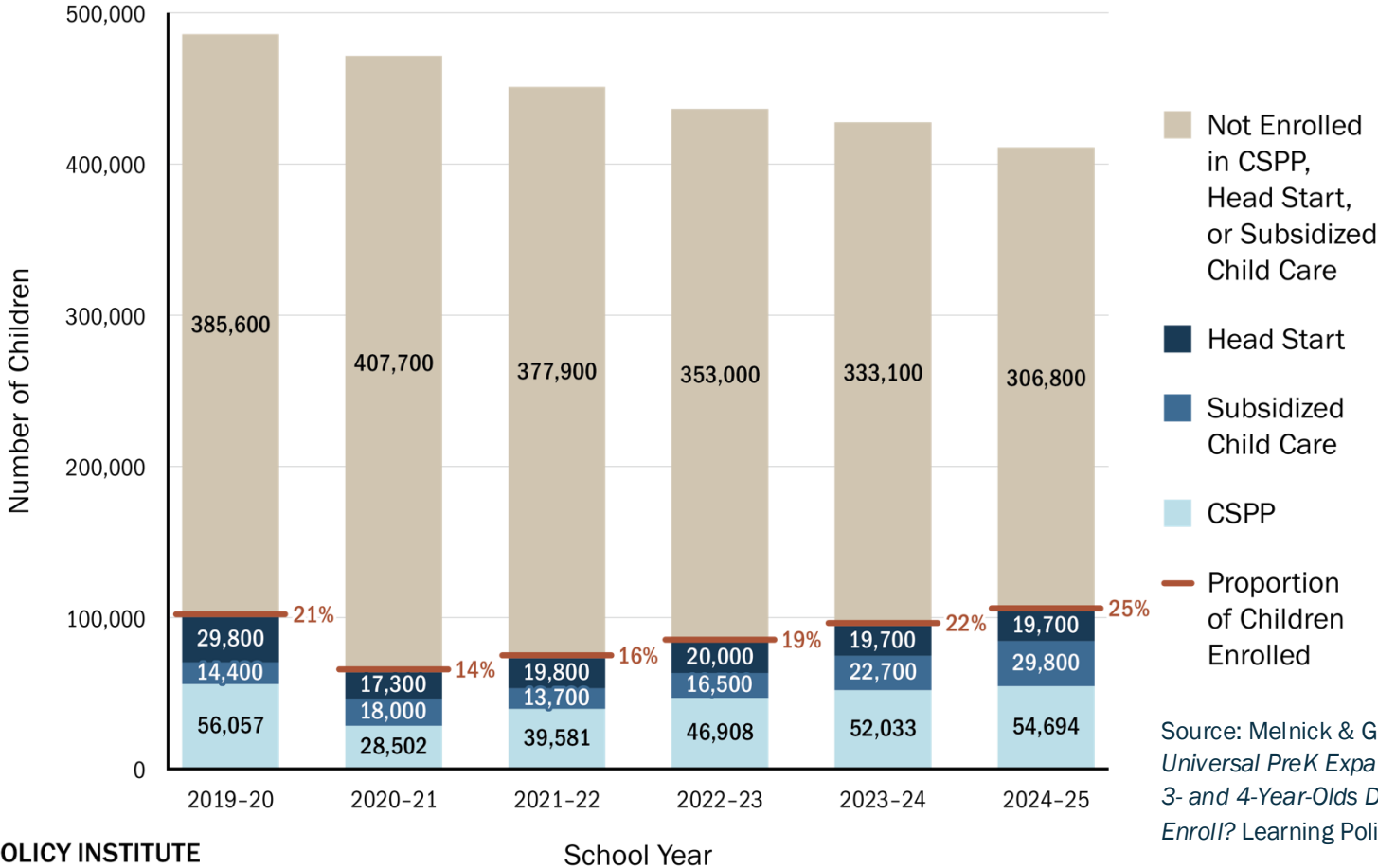
25%

of 3-year-olds of all incomes  
enrolled in 2024-25

44%

of 3-year-olds from  
households with low-  
incomes (<85% SMI)  
enrolled in 2024-25

# California enrolls many 3-year-olds, but has room to grow



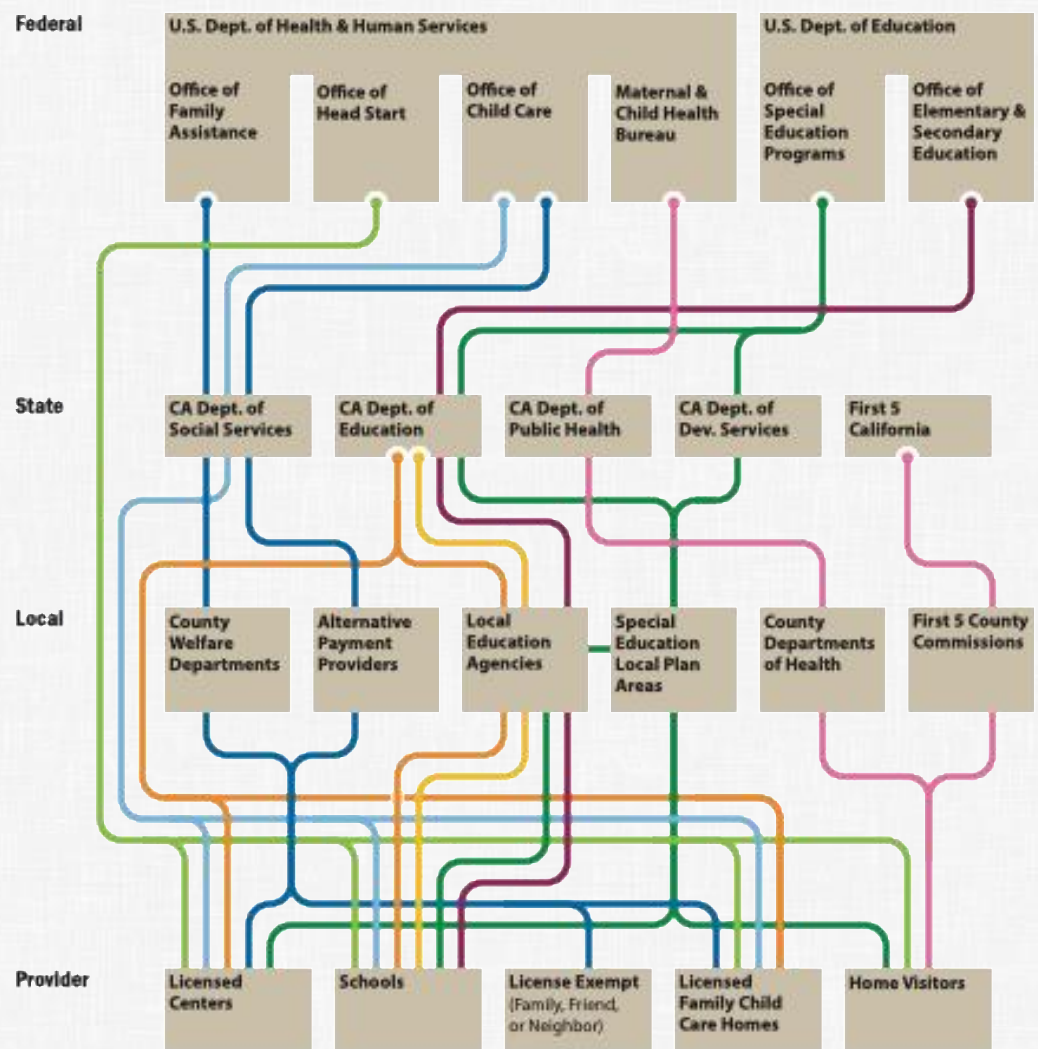
Source: Melnick & Garcia. (2026). *Universal PreK Expansion: How Many 3- and 4-Year-Olds Does California Enroll?* Learning Policy Institute.

# UPK governance is complex and fragmented

## Programs



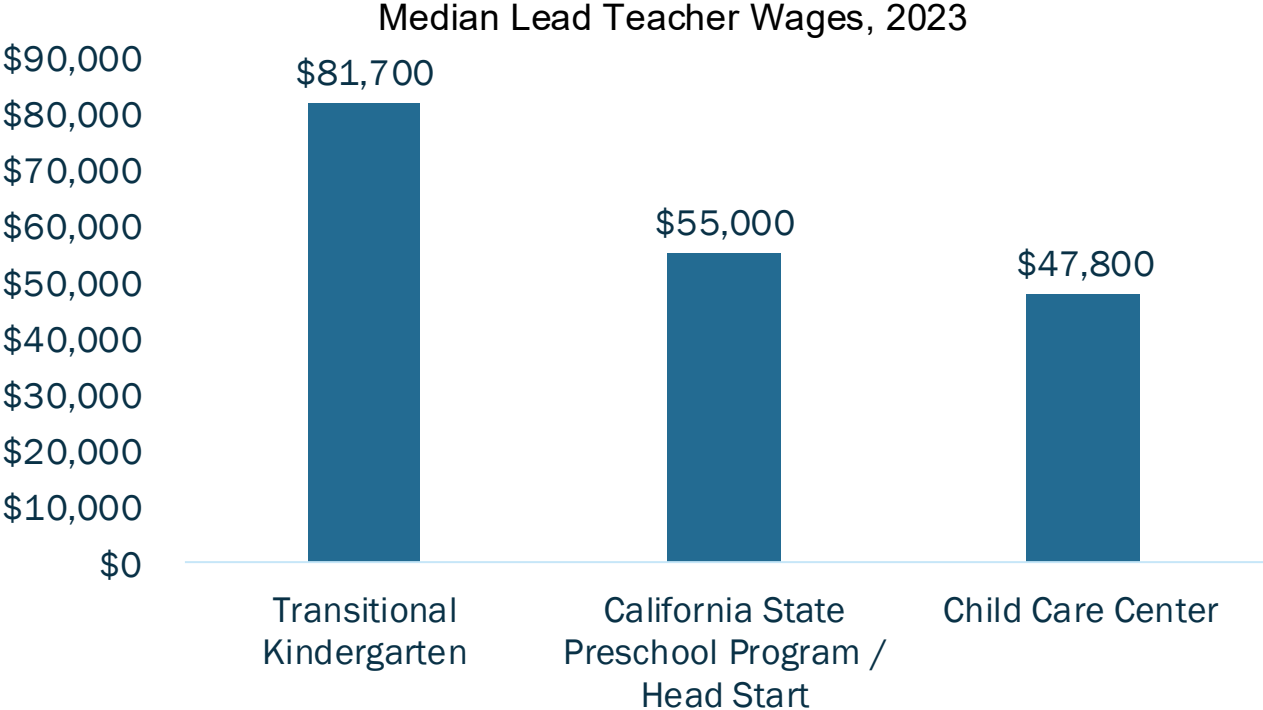
Source: Melnick, H., Tinubu Ali, T. Gardner, M., Maier, A., & Wechsler, M. (2017). *Understanding California's early care and education system*. Learning Policy Institute.



# UPK quality and staffing requirements vary

	Child-adult ratio	Lead teacher minimum requirements
Transitional Kindergarten	10:1	Teaching Credential
California State Preschool Program	8:1	Child Development Permit
Head Start	10:1	A.A. or B.A.
Subsidized Child Care	12:1	12 units of ECE (centers) None (FCC)

# Compensation for teachers varies by program



Source: Muruvi, W., Powell, A., Kim, Y., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L. J. E. (2024). The economic well-being of early educators in California. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.



# Promising Local Practices: Four Case Studies

# Case Study Sites

Site	Region
Alum Rock Union School District	Bay Area
Lindsay Unified School District	Central Valley
Long Beach (City)	Southern California
San Francisco (City)	Bay Area

# Governance and Administration

## Key Themes

- Strong ECE leadership
- Long-term strategic planning

## Examples

- District ECE directors
- San Francisco Department of Early Childhood
- Long Beach ECE Committee



*I had no idea where to look other than driving by and seeing that there was a Montessori there. I had no idea what our options were .... I didn't have time for that.*

*–Parent*

# Outreach and Enrollment

## Key Themes

- Clear, shared messaging with community partners
- Simplified enrollment

## Examples

- City-wide events
- Neighborhood eligibility
- Long Beach Early Learning Hub
- Early Learning SF



*The marketing of TK [is] hard to compete with. To tell parents they have a choice has been a struggle.*

*–Doris Jacildo, Executive Director, Child Lane*

# Stabilizing the Mixed Delivery System

## Key Themes

- Facility supports
- Scholarships to fill unmet need

## Examples

- Repurposed campuses
- Facility expansion & renovation grants
- City-funded infant and toddler care
- Middle-income scholarships

# Quality Standards

## Key Themes

- Aligned program standards
- Joint professional development

## Examples

- Blended TK and CSPP
- Shared quality standards, professional development, and coaching



*Staffing is the elephant in the room... they can go to the school district to make a lot more money, better benefits, things that we can't afford as a nonprofit organization.*

*–Sarah Soriano, Executive Director, Young Horizons*

# Workforce

## SF Workforce Compensation Initiative

- \$4,000 to \$40,000 per teacher
- Based on:

Education level


% Subsidized children served

Part/full time status

# Recommendations

1. Consolidate or coordinate administrative agencies
2. Develop a coordinated enrollment system
3. Align quality and staffing requirements while increasing rates and pay
4. Help providers shift to serving younger children

Source: Melnick, H., Wechsler, M. E., Wang, V., & Plasencia, S. (2026). Universal preschool in California: Promising practices for mixed delivery systems. Learning Policy Institute.



# Local Perspectives on California's Mixed Delivery System

# California's Mixed Delivery System: Local Perspectives

- **Alejandra Albarran Moses**  
Early Childhood Strategic Initiatives Program Manager, Long Beach  
Department of Health and Human Services
- **Cheri Doria**  
Director of Early Childhood Education, Lindsay Unified School District
- **Ingrid X. Mezquita**  
Executive Director, San Francisco Department of Early Childhood
- **Mirel Herrera** (*moderator*)  
Senior Policy Analyst, Early Edge California



# Colorado's Mixed Delivery System: Lessons for California



# Colorado's Progress in Early Childhood

In 2022, the Colorado legislature approved HB 22-1295

- Established the Colorado Department of Early Childhood and Colorado's Universal Preschool program.
- Goal was to streamline early childhood programs and expand access to preschool statewide.

# Colorado's UPK Program

All four-year-olds are eligible for 15 hours of free preschool per week in the leading into kindergarten

Families may qualify for additional based on need

Delivered through a mixed delivery system:

- Public schools
- Community-based providers
- Licensed family childcare homes

# Colorado's Mixed Delivery System: Lessons for California

- **Lisa R. Roy**  
Executive Director, Colorado Department of Early Childhood
- **Patricia Lozano** (*moderator*)  
Executive Director, Early Edge California



# Closing Remarks

Mia Bonta | California Assemblymember, District 18

# Thank You!



Find event information and related research by scanning the QR code or visit <https://bit.ly/3ZTIhjh>



## Universal Preschool in California

Promising Practices for Mixed Delivery Systems

Hanna Melnick, Marjorie E. Wechsler, Victoria Wang, and Sara Plasencia



FEBRUARY 2026