



California's Universal Prekindergarten Implementation, 2024–25

Victoria Wang

Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	iv
Introduction	1
Transitional Kindergarten Implementation	3
TK Service Delivery Models.....	5
TK Facilities.....	9
TK Instruction and Assessment.....	10
Supporting Student Needs in TK.....	15
Staffing TK Classrooms	17
Professional Development for TK Teachers.....	20
Universal Prekindergarten Implementation in Local Education Agencies	24
UPK Service Delivery Models.....	24
UPK Staffing.....	27
Professional Development for School Leaders.....	29
Challenges and Technical Assistance Needs	32
Implications and Conclusion.....	38
Endnotes	40
About the Author	43

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1 TK Enrollment, Eligible Population, and Uptake, 2019–20 to 2024–25.....	4
Figure 2 TK Delivery Models, 2022–23 to 2024–25	6
Figure 3 Percentage of LEAs Offering Full-Day and Part-Day TK in 2024–25.....	7
Figure 4 LEAs Reporting Enough Classrooms to Meet Projected 2025–26 Enrollment in 2022–23 to 2024–25	9
Figure 5 TK Staffing Needs, 2022–23 to 2025–26	18
Figure 6 TK Staffing Needs and Vacancies at the Beginning of 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25.....	19
Figure 7 Number of UPK Classrooms in LEAs by Type, 2022–23 to 2024–25	25
Figure 8 LEAs’ CSPP and Head Start Staffing Needs, 2022–23 to 2025–26.....	28
Figure 9 CSPP and Head Start Staffing Needs and Vacancies at the Beginning of 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25	29

Table 1	TK Rollout Schedule.....	3
Table 2	Number and Percentage of LEAs Offering TK at All Elementary Sites.....	5
Table 3	Expanded Learning Programs Provided to Extend the TK Instructional Day, 2022–23 to 2024–25.....	8
Table 4	Curricular Approaches Used in TK, 2022–23 to 2024–25	12
Table 5	Assessments Used in TK, 2022–23 to 2024–25	13
Table 6	Strategies Used to Support Social and Emotional Learning, 2022–23 to 2024–25	14
Table 7	Instructional Practices Used to Support Children With Disabilities, 2022–23 to 2024–25.....	16
Table 8	Strategies to Support Toileting, 2022–23 to 2024–25	17
Table 9	Professional Development Opportunities Offered to TK Staff in 2024–25	21
Table 10	Percentage of UPK Classrooms That LEAs Reported Were Dual Language Immersion in 2024–25, by Classroom Type	26
Table 11	Percentage of UPK Classrooms That LEAs Reported Were Inclusive of Students With Disabilities in 2024–25, by Classroom Type	27
Table 12	Lead Teacher Requirements in TK, CSPP, and Head Start.....	27
Table 13	Percentage of LEAs Offering Professional Development Opportunities to School Leaders, 2022–23 to 2024–25.....	30
Table 14	Technical Assistance Topics Most Requested by LEAs, 2022–23 to 2024–25	36

Executive Summary

California has made a historic commitment to early childhood through its recent investments in its universal prekindergarten (UPK) initiative, which consists of transitional kindergarten (TK), the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), Head Start, and other early learning programs such as private preschools and family child care. Since the onset of its UPK initiative in 2021, the state has invested significant funding in UPK programming, and early research indicates that the state's investments have resulted in increases of 3- and 4-year-old enrollment in California's publicly funded UPK programs.

The state's investments in early childhood programs hold significant promise for California's early learners, but only if implemented with accessibility in mind and with research-based elements of high-quality preschool. Early examination of TK implementation, California's largest UPK investment, has highlighted steady progress among local education agencies (LEAs), as well as critical challenges across a variety of implementation areas.

This report builds on the early research base examining implementation of UPK within California's LEAs by analyzing data from an annual survey administered to all LEAs receiving a UPK Planning and Implementation Grant from the California Department of Education. The 2024–25 survey includes responses from 1,497 LEAs, which represent almost all (98%) elementary and unified school districts and three fourths (75%) of elementary and K–12 charter schools in the state. Findings provide insights into LEAs' progress in universal TK expansion, including how LEAs structured and expanded access to TK classrooms, facility needs, instruction and assessment, supporting student needs, staffing, and professional development. Findings additionally shed light on LEAs' progress in UPK implementation outside of TK expansion, including service delivery models for all UPK programs, CSPP and Head Start staffing, professional development for school and site leaders, and challenges around and needs for UPK implementation.

Key Takeaways

- **LEAs have made consistent progress expanding and improving the accessibility of TK offerings across the state.** In 2024–25, 94% of responding LEAs reported offering TK. Among LEAs with multiple elementary schools, 70% offered TK at all sites—an increase from prior years. Eighty-five percent of LEAs offered a full-day TK option, and 88% offered expanded learning programs for TK students.
- **LEAs continue to offer programs such as CSPP, Head Start, and other early learning programs.** In addition to TK, one fourth (24%) of LEAs reported operating CSPP, 4% reported operating at least one Head Start classroom, and 16% reported operating another early learning program, such as locally funded or district-funded preschool; these percentages have remained consistent since 2023–24.
- **Most LEAs report having sufficient classroom space to support full TK expansion, though lack of appropriate facilities remains a persistent concern.** Nearly all (95%) LEAs indicated they expect to have adequate classroom space to meet projected TK enrollment by 2025–26; however, 1 in 4 identified facilities as a top challenge, citing a need for age-appropriate modifications or additional space.

- **TK staffing levels have remained relatively stable throughout expansion, though challenges around recruitment and retention of qualified staff persist.** Vacancy rates for TK lead and assistant teachers have held steady across the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years (1% and 3%, respectively), even as staffing needs have increased with program expansion. However, one fourth of LEAs cited challenges in recruiting and retaining staff as a top challenge in UPK implementation.
- **More LEAs are adopting developmentally appropriate approaches to UPK implementation.** A growing share of LEAs reported offering professional development for TK lead and assistant teachers focused on developmentally appropriate practices and serving children with disabilities. Additionally, an increased proportion of LEAs reported use of play-based learning; developmentally appropriate classroom environments; and open-ended, self-directed learning opportunities.
- **LEAs continue to face challenges meeting the developmental and behavioral needs of younger students.** Many LEAs reported ongoing difficulties supporting younger TK students, including challenges related to toileting, behavior, and implementing developmentally appropriate practices, underscoring the need for additional training, staffing supports, and aligned instructional guidance.
- **New challenges are emerging as TK reaches full expansion.** LEAs reported concerns with sustaining funding for UPK implementation after one-time grant funds such as the UPK Planning and Implementation Grant and Early Education Teacher Development Grant subsidy. Additionally, LEAs described how enrollment challenges, including both under-enrollment and demand that exceeds capacity, impacted their ability to adequately staff and structure their TK programs. Finally, several LEAs noted growing impacts of TK expansion on lower enrollment and staffing challenges within other LEA- and community-based preschool programs outside of TK.

Implications

Three years of UPK implementation data show that California has made meaningful progress toward full TK expansion, while continuing to face persistent and emerging challenges. As California continues its historic investment in UPK, the state has opportunities to strengthen quality and sustainability by:

- providing additional funding to support the modification or expansion of developmentally appropriate facilities;
- investing in pipelines for TK lead and assistant teachers, particularly as one-time UPK funds (such as the Early Education Teacher Development Grant) end and new staffing requirements go into effect;
- supporting and expanding pathways to a PK–3 Early Childhood Education (ECE) Specialist Instruction credential to strengthen TK lead teachers' preparation in developmentally appropriate practice;
- strengthening and sustaining professional development opportunities for TK lead teachers, assistant teachers, and school leaders;
- stabilizing publicly funded preschool and child care programs to alleviate staffing and enrollment shifts throughout UPK implementation through strategies such as updating reimbursement rates;

- offering technical assistance on the design and selection of curriculum and assessments, including guidance on alignment across and within grade levels; and
- expanding resources and supports for inclusive classrooms, behavioral supports, and student support services.

Furthermore, as California continues to advance its historic investment in UPK, a deeper understanding of implementation and impact across the state's diverse, mixed delivery system is critical. While this report provides insights into self-reported progress in LEA-based programs, several areas warrant further examination to inform policy and practice, including how providers are serving multilingual students and students with disabilities; whether TK students are receiving developmentally appropriate instruction; availability of professional development opportunities across the mixed delivery system; the impact of TK expansion on California's broader early learning landscape; and how families are experiencing the state's complex UPK system.

Overall, California's UPK expansion, and TK in particular, reflects significant momentum and commitment to early learning. As implementation continues to mature, ongoing investment, targeted technical assistance, and thoughtful data collection will be essential to sustaining progress and ensuring that all young learners across the state have access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate early learning opportunities.

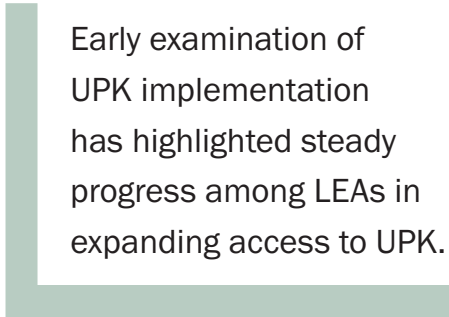
Introduction

California has made a historic commitment to early childhood through its recent investments in its universal prekindergarten (UPK) initiative, which consists of transitional kindergarten (TK), the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), Head Start, and other early learning programs such as private preschools and family child care. The state’s commitment to UPK, codified in 2021, includes the expansion of TK—a free, district-based prekindergarten program—to all 4-year-olds by the 2025–26 school year; continued investments in the CSPP—a state-funded preschool program for 2- to 5-year-olds who qualify based on family need or disability status; and an increase in the number of subsidized child care slots.

Since the onset of its UPK initiative, the state has invested \$500 million in the UPK Planning and Implementation Grant to local education agencies (LEAs) to support TK and CSPP implementation and strengthen partnerships and \$108 million in the Early Education Teacher Development Grant to support the development of CSPP and TK teachers.¹ In addition to these one-time grant funds, California has made ongoing investments to support expansion of its publicly funded preschool programs: Most recently, California’s 2025–26 budget provided about \$7 billion for TK and CSPP programs—a \$2.1 billion increase from the prior year.

Early research on UPK enrollment indicates that the state’s investments have resulted in a notable increase in 4-year-old enrollment in California’s publicly funded UPK programs, with much of the increase coming from universal TK expansion. Three-year-old enrollment has increased as well, albeit at a slower pace.² California’s recent investments in early childhood programs hold significant promise for the state’s early learners, but only if implemented with accessibility in mind and with research-based elements of high-quality preschool, such as sufficient learning time; low child–adult ratios; well-prepared and well-supported teachers; meaningful family engagement; and developmentally appropriate practices, curricula, and assessments.³

Early examination of UPK implementation has highlighted steady progress among LEAs in expanding access to UPK, alongside reported implementation challenges related to maintaining adequate and appropriate facilities; recruiting and retaining qualified staff; offering early childhood professional development for teachers and school leaders; supporting students with varying behavioral, developmental, and social-emotional needs; establishing developmentally appropriate learning environments; having sufficient funding for UPK implementation; and meeting families’ needs for after-school care.⁴



Early examination of UPK implementation has highlighted steady progress among LEAs in expanding access to UPK.

This report builds on the early research base examining implementation of UPK within California’s LEAs by analyzing data from a survey administered to all LEAs receiving a UPK Planning and Implementation Grant from the California Department of Education. The survey, fielded in September 2025, addresses UPK implementation in LEAs during the 2024–25 school year and is the fourth iteration of the questionnaire.

Prior surveys were fielded by the California Department of Education in the fall of 2022, 2023, and 2024 and results summarized by the Learning Policy Institute in reports published in April 2023, July 2024, and June 2025, respectively.⁵

All LEAs receiving funding from the UPK Planning and Implementation Grant were required to respond to the survey. A total of 1,497 LEAs responded to the September 2025 survey, including 847 school districts and 650 charter schools. The survey respondents represent 98% of the 861 elementary and unified school districts and 75% of the 872 elementary and K–12 charter schools in the state.⁶ A total of 83 LEA respondents reported not offering TK in the 2024–25 school year. Throughout the report, we calculate percentages based only on the 1,414 LEAs who reported offering TK in the 2024–25 school year. We include comparisons to prior years where survey items were consistent.⁷ Finally, we conducted a thematic analysis of LEAs’ open-ended responses regarding the biggest challenges in UPK implementation.

In this report, we first describe LEA progress in universal TK expansion, including how LEAs structured and expanded access to TK classrooms, facility needs, instruction and assessment, supporting student needs, staffing, and professional development. We then provide broader findings on LEA implementation of UPK, including data related to early learning programs such as CSPP, Head Start, and locally funded LEA programs. This UPK implementation section addresses LEAs’ UPK delivery models, CSPP and Head Start staffing, professional development for school and site leaders, and challenges around and needs for UPK implementation.

Transitional Kindergarten Implementation

Since the onset of its UPK initiative in 2021, transitional kindergarten (TK) has been California’s largest investment in universal prekindergarten (UPK). Established in 2010, TK was originally intended for children who had just missed the cutoff for kindergarten eligibility (i.e., those who turned 5 between September 2 and December 2 of the school year).⁸ Unlike other state and federally funded early education programs, TK does not have income-eligibility requirements and is operated exclusively by local education agencies (LEAs).

In 2021, California committed to universal TK for all 4-year-olds, progressively extending the age eligibility by 2 or 3 additional months each year (see [Table 1](#)). The legislature also added new child–adult ratio requirements.⁹

Table 1. TK Rollout Schedule

Academic year(s)	TK eligibility (date of 5th birthday)	Portion of 4-year-olds eligible	Child–adult ratio
2011–12 to 2021–22	September 2–December 2	25%	31:1
2022–23	September 2–February 2	42%	12:1
2023–24	September 2–April 2	58%	12:1
2024–25	September 2–June 2	75%	12:1
2025–26	September 2–September 1	100%	10:1

Note: To calculate the portion of children eligible by age, we assume children’s birthdays are distributed evenly across months.

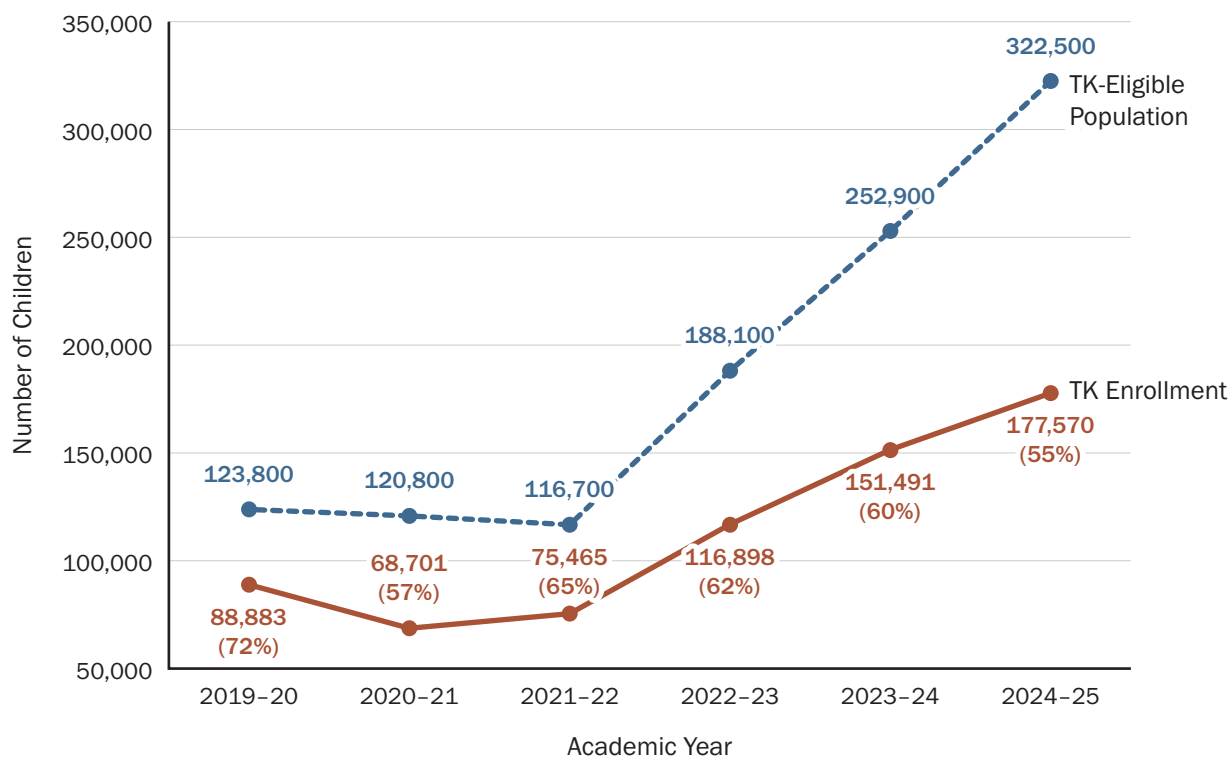
Sources: California Education Code § 48000 (2023); U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). *State population by characteristics: 2020–2025. U.S. Census’ annual estimates of the resident population by single year of age and sex for California: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2024*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *State population by characteristics: 2010–2012. Annual estimates of the resident population by single year of age and sex for California: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019; April 1, 2020; and July 1, 2020.*

TK is primarily funded through California’s Local Control Funding Formula, which distributes state funding to LEAs based on student population, with additional funding for high-need students. In the 2024–25 school year, LEAs funded through the state funding formula received \$11,068 per TK student through the adjusted base grant, with an additional “TK add-on” of \$3,077 per student to support the required child–adult ratios.¹⁰ In the 2025–26 school year, the “TK add-on” funding increased to \$5,545 per student to account for the lowered child–adult ratios.¹¹ However, some LEAs are designated as “basic aid,” meaning they do not receive state funding because their local property tax revenue is sufficient to meet or exceed their target funding that would have been provided through the Local Control Funding Formula, without the need for state aid. These districts are still expected to offer TK, but they do not receive additional state funding for new TK students.¹²

Since TK expansion began, enrollment in the program has increased substantially, growing from 88,883 children in 2019–20 to 177,570 in 2024–25 (see Figure 1). While the total number of children enrolled in TK has risen, it has not kept pace with the rapid increase in 4-year-olds eligible for TK over the course of TK expansion; consequently, the proportion of eligible 4-year-olds enrolled has declined over the first 3 years of expansion, dropping from 65% in 2021–22 pre-expansion to 55% in 2024–25.¹³ It is not fully understood why overall uptake of TK has declined throughout expansion, though the trend may be caused by lack of awareness about TK, differing family preferences and needs, or potential barriers to enrollment.¹⁴

Since TK expansion began, enrollment in the program has increased substantially.

Figure 1. TK Enrollment, Eligible Population, and Uptake, 2019–20 to 2024–25



Notes: Percentages in parentheses represent the share of the TK-eligible population enrolled in TK (i.e., the uptake rate). The eligible population is rounded to the closest 100.

Source: Melnick, H., & García, E. (2026). *Universal PreK expansion: How many 3- and 4-year-olds does California enroll?* [Brief]. Learning Policy Institute.

In the following subsections, we delve into key components of universal TK expansion to understand how these children were served in the 2024–25 school year.

TK Service Delivery Models

LEAs make many decisions that impact children’s TK access and experience, including where to offer TK, how to structure their TK classrooms, and how long the TK day will be. Findings indicate that over the past 4 years, LEAs have made consistent progress in increasing the accessibility of their TK offerings.

Who offered TK in 2024–25?

All school districts that operate a kindergarten program are required to offer TK for age-eligible children. Charter schools are encouraged, but not required, to offer TK.¹⁵ Out of the responding 1,497 LEAs, 94% reported offering TK in 2024–25, same as 94% in 2023–24.

A total of 83 LEAs (52 charters and 31 school districts) reported not offering TK in 2024–25. These LEAs were asked in an open-ended question why they did not offer TK in 2024–25. The two most common reasons noted were having low or no enrollment (in which case TK-eligible children may have been sent to a neighboring LEA) and lack of facility space.

Where did LEAs offer TK?

While all LEAs are required to offer TK, they can decide whether to offer TK in all, or only some, of the elementary sites. This decision affects TK uptake, as location plays a large role in families’ selections among early care and education options.¹⁶ Additionally, children are more likely to be enrolled in TK when it is offered at their local elementary school where they will attend kindergarten.¹⁷

Among all 1,414 LEAs offering TK in 2024–25, 578 operated more than one elementary site, 70% of which offered TK across all elementary sites—an increase from 62% in 2023–24 (see [Table 2](#)). When looking at all LEAs, including those with only one elementary school, 88% of LEAs offered TK at all elementary school sites within their service area in 2024–25, an increase from 85% in 2023–24 and 81% in 2022–23.

Table 2. Number and Percentage of LEAs Offering TK at All Elementary Sites

Category	Number of LEAs	Number of LEAs offering TK at all sites	Percentage of LEAs offering TK at all sites
LEAs with 1 elementary site	836	836	100%
LEAs with more than 1 elementary site	578	404	70%
All LEAs offering TK	1,414	1,240	88%

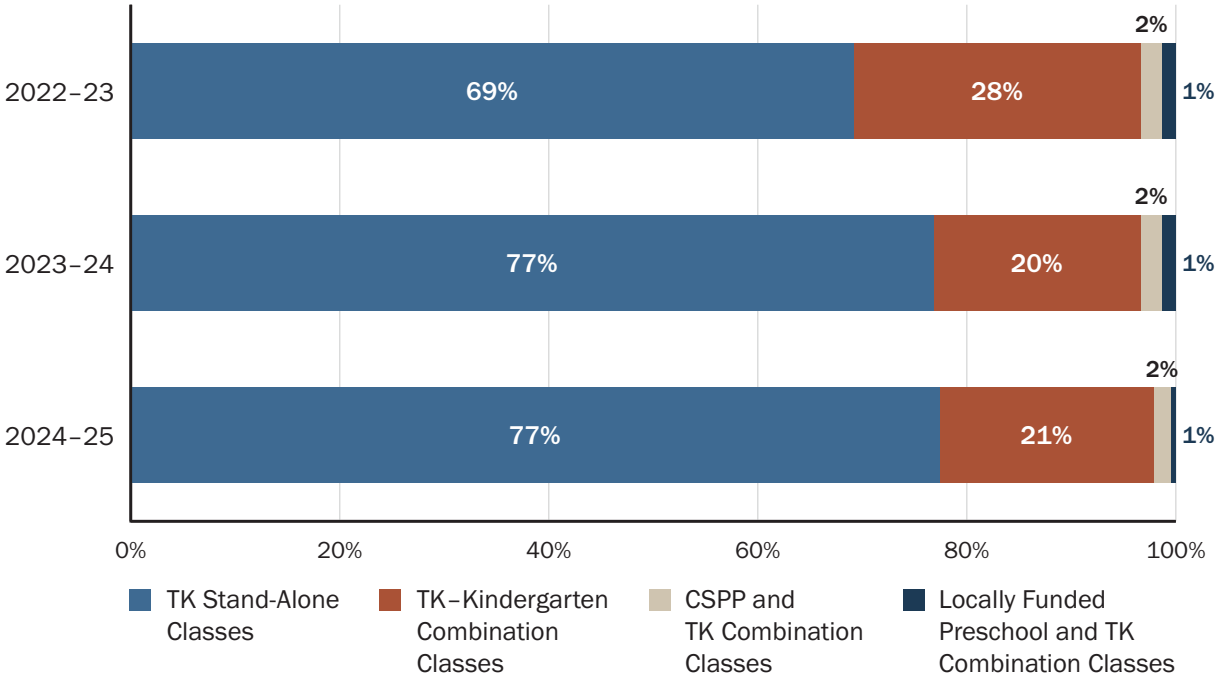
Source: California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

How did LEAs structure their TK classrooms?

LEAs may structure their TK classrooms in several ways. They can operate stand-alone TK classes serving only TK students, or they can provide some form of TK combination class, whether with another grade level such as kindergarten, or another early learning program such as CSPP or a locally funded preschool program. These choices shape students’ learning environments and experiences. Multiage classrooms, such as when TK is combined with kindergarten, can be developmentally appropriate with adequate differentiation and student supports, though prior research found that TK–kindergarten classrooms were more likely to resemble a typical kindergarten classroom than a preschool classroom.¹⁸ TK classrooms combined with other early learning programs such as CSPP must meet CSPP’s higher quality requirements for child assessment, classroom observations, lower child–adult ratio, and facility standards.¹⁹

In 2024–25, LEAs operated a total of 11,736 TK classrooms. Statewide, the overall distribution of TK classroom types did not shift between the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years: The majority of TK classrooms were TK stand-alone (77%), one fifth were TK–kindergarten combination classrooms (21%), and fewer than 3% of classrooms were either TK–CSPP or TK and locally funded preschool combination classrooms (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. TK Delivery Models, 2022–23 to 2024–25



Notes: Percentages represent the number of each TK classroom type among all TK classrooms in the state. Percentages may add up to more than 100% due to rounding.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

In an open-ended question about biggest challenges in UPK implementation, some LEAs—particularly smaller LEAs with low enrollment—discussed difficulties in supporting the wide developmental ranges within multiage classrooms. A respondent from a small, rural charter school shared:

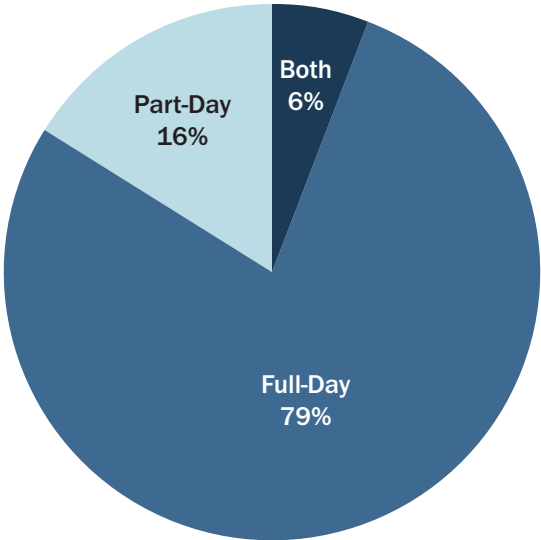
As a small rural school with just one TK–kindergarten combination class and one teacher and one aide, our biggest challenge is meeting the growing UPK requirements with limited staffing and space. Because we serve multiple grade levels in the same classroom, it’s difficult to fully separate and implement all the developmentally appropriate practices for both TK and kindergarten students—especially when expectations, curriculum, and assessment tools differ.

How many LEAs offered full-day TK?

California law requires TK programs to provide a minimum of 180 instructional minutes per day.²⁰ LEAs wishing to offer a full-day program can extend the day by pairing TK with other early education or expanded learning programs.²¹ In addition to lengthening the school day, expanded learning programs can extend the school year to offer care during school breaks and over the summer. A longer preschool day and year can have positive impacts on students’ school readiness outcomes, and it can better meet the needs of working families.²²

Eighty-five percent of LEAs offered a full-day TK (more than 4 hours) option in 2024–25, similar to the 84% who did so in 2023–24. In 2024–25, 79% of LEAs offered only full-day TK and 6% offered both full-day and part-day options, while 16% offered part-day TK (3 to 4 hours) only (see [Figure 3](#)).

Figure 3. Percentage of LEAs Offering Full-Day and Part-Day TK in 2024–25



Notes: Part-day TK is defined as 3 to 4 hours. Full-day TK is defined as more than 4 hours. *N* = 1,414 LEAs. Percentages add up to more than 100% due to rounding.

Source: California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

To extend the school day or year for TK students, LEAs can offer additional programming through other early learning programs (such as CSPP, Head Start, or locally funded preschool) or expanded learning programs. Expanded learning programs vary in program quality and hours provided and, unlike early learning programs, often serve a wider range of students and may not be designed to meet the developmental needs of 4-year-old students.

In 2024–25, 88% of LEAs offered at least one program to extend the TK instructional day. LEAs continued to primarily offer programs to extend the TK day on LEA sites: 82% offered expanded learning programs on an LEA site, and 8% extended the TK day with CSPP on an LEA site. By comparison, a smaller but growing share of LEAs offered expanded learning programs on community-based sites, increasing from 6% in 2022–23 to 9% in 2024–25 (see [Table 3](#)).

Table 3. Expanded Learning Programs Provided to Extend the TK Instructional Day, 2022–23 to 2024–25

Program	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Expanded learning programs on an LEA site	78%	80%	82%
Expanded learning programs at a community-based organization site	6%	8%	9%
CSPP (on an LEA site)	10%	10%	8%
LEA-funded or locally funded preschool	8%	5%	5%
Head Start	3%	2%	2%
Other	12%	8%	6%
None	14%	13%	12%

Notes: LEAs could select more than one option; percentages do not add up to 100%. Expanded learning programs on both an LEA and community-based organization site include After School Education and Safety (ASES), 21st Century Community Learning Center, and Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP). “Other” includes the following survey items: Other community-based preschool, state subsidized child care (not including CSPP), LEA preschool funded with Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act funds, CSPP (at a community-based organization site), and other.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

How many LEAs offered transportation for students?

LEAs’ available transportation options—including transportation to and from the TK program as well as between the TK program and an expanded learning program—can impact students’ access to TK and the LEAs’ ability to meet families’ needs.

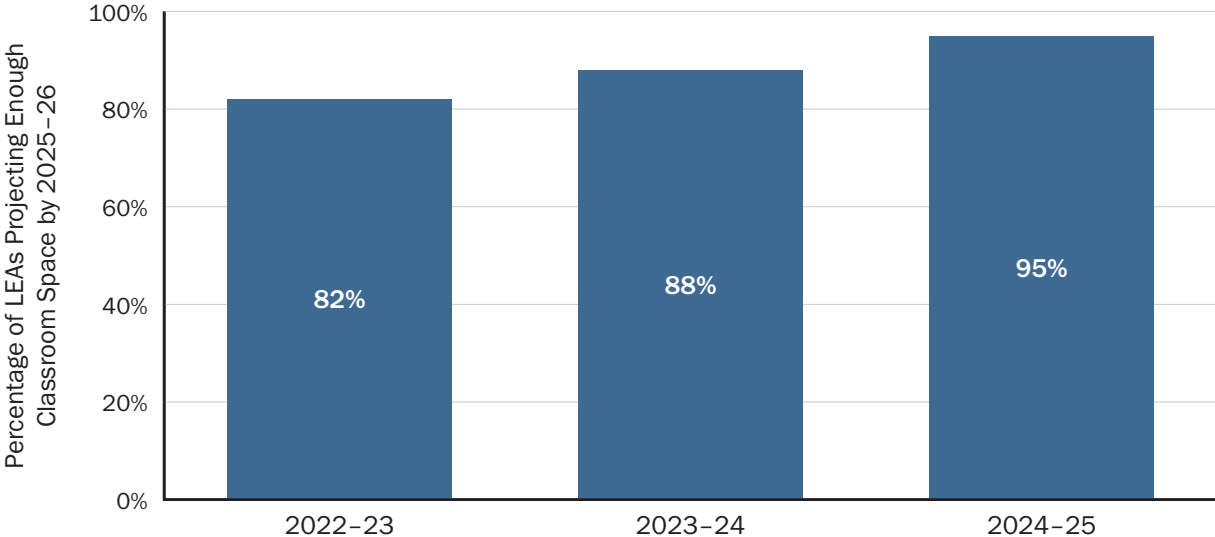
While California LEAs are not required to provide transportation to all students,²³ the proportion of LEAs offering transportation to and from the TK program for students has slowly increased over the course of expansion: 44% provided transportation in 2022–23; 47% in 2023–24; and 48% in 2024–25. The percentage offering transportation from the TK program to expanded learning at an LEA site (5%) or community-based site (2%) has remained consistent between 2023–24 and 2024–25.

TK Facilities

TK expansion has required the addition and updating of classrooms, bathrooms, and play areas to ensure facilities are safe, sufficient, and developmentally appropriate for early learners. These facility needs have consistently been elevated as challenges by LEAs throughout TK expansion.²⁴

Encouragingly, when LEAs were asked in 2024–25 if they expected to have sufficient space to meet projected enrollment by 2025–26, 95% reported having enough classroom space, compared to 88% in 2023–24 and 82% in 2022–23. LEAs who said they did not have sufficient space reported needing a total of 185 additional classrooms statewide to meet projected enrollment in 2025–26—a notable drop from the 488 and 946 reported when asked in 2023–24 and 2022–23, respectively.

Figure 4. LEAs Reporting Enough Classrooms to Meet Projected 2025–26 Enrollment in 2022–23 to 2024–25



Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

While LEAs seem to be making progress in building facilities capacity for TK, facilities remain a top challenge, consistent with prior years.

About one fourth of LEAs mentioned facilities when describing their biggest challenge facing UPK implementation. In some cases, lack of facilities limited LEAs' ability to expand and extend their TK offerings. A respondent from a medium-sized, urban school district shared:

The biggest challenge our LEA is facing is the lack of available space to expand our TK classrooms. We want all of our TK classrooms to be offered for a full day. We are in the process of exploring plans to build our next school site, but that will not happen for another 2 to 3 years. Until then, we will continue to utilize many shared spaces for TK classes that overlap.

Some LEAs expressed concern with temporary solutions to facilities challenges. According to a respondent from a medium-sized, suburban school district:

One of the most pressing challenges is securing and maintaining appropriate physical spaces for early learners. Age-appropriate restrooms, outdoor learning areas, and flexible classroom furniture are often limited, making it difficult to provide the high-quality, developmentally responsive environments that young children need. Portable classrooms or retrofitted spaces are frequently used, but they are not ideal for long-term UPK success.

Campuses originally designed for older elementary grades pose logistical and safety challenges. A respondent from another medium-sized, suburban district shared:

Some classrooms lack direct access to bathrooms, which is particularly problematic when serving students who are not yet potty trained. This creates logistical and supervision issues, as staff must frequently escort children long distances for basic needs, taking them away from instructional and play time. Additionally, limited space means many TK classrooms must share indoor and outdoor areas. Enclosed play areas are scarce, and safety is a constant concern.

TK Instruction and Assessment

With the addition of younger 4-year-olds, LEAs must carefully select age-appropriate curricula and assessments, train staff to use such materials with fidelity, and adjust their practices to meet the social and emotional needs of younger children. In 2024–25, LEAs continued to use a wide range of curricula in TK classrooms, and an increasing percentage are using the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) assessment.

What curricula did LEAs use in TK?

Developmentally appropriate curricula and pedagogy are crucial elements of high-quality early learning, especially when they include well-designed and intentional learning experiences, responsive teaching strategies, well-defined objectives, and opportunities to differentiate across a variety of children's needs.²⁵ While California does not

Developmentally appropriate curricula and pedagogy are crucial elements of high-quality early learning.

require specific curricula or assessments for TK classrooms, LEAs must select TK curricula that align with the California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations developed by the California Department of Education in 2024.²⁶

Research reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine suggests that of the curricula currently available, domain-specific curricula (i.e., curricula that address a specific area of content or development, versus comprehensive curricula) are most successful in supporting child development.²⁷ Experts also suggest integrating curricula to ensure that all domains of development are addressed in the school day.²⁸

Consistent with prior years of data, in the 2024–25 school year, LEAs reported using a variety of curricula in their TK programs, with most LEAs (88%) reporting using between one and four curricular approaches. The most common curricular approaches include a social-emotional curriculum (49%), PreK literacy-specific curriculum (42%), whole child or comprehensive PreK curriculum (38%), and PreK math-specific curriculum (33%).

Year-over-year data indicate downward trends in usage of PreK literacy-specific curriculum, kindergarten curriculum, and district- or teacher-developed math or literacy units (see [Table 4](#)). Usage of whole child or comprehensive PreK curriculum and PreK math-specific curriculum has fluctuated between 2022–23 and 2024–25, while use of social-emotional curriculum dropped between 2022–23 and 2023–24 but remained consistent over the past year. It is unclear from the data why these shifts occurred, and further examination is needed to understand how LEAs are selecting and using curricula, as well as how these decisions impact student learning.

Fewer LEAs used kindergarten curriculum in TK classrooms in 2024–25 than prior years, though almost 1 in 5 continue to do so. If use of kindergarten curricula is not modified to support younger development of 4-year-olds, instruction may not be developmentally appropriate. Additionally, if the same kindergarten curricula are repeated when TK students move into kindergarten classrooms, students may miss opportunities to learn new skills and knowledge.

Among the 256 LEAs who used kindergarten curriculum, about half (125 LEAs) operated TK–kindergarten classrooms. The remaining 131 LEAs using kindergarten curriculum did not operate any TK–kindergarten classrooms, suggesting that about 1 in 10 LEAs may be using kindergarten curriculum in TK classrooms with only 4-year-olds.

Table 4. Curricular Approaches Used in TK, 2022–23 to 2024–25

Curricular approach	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Social-emotional curriculum	56%	49%	49%
PreK literacy-specific curriculum	52%	46%	42%
Whole child or comprehensive PreK curriculum	41%	34%	38%
PreK math-specific curriculum	30%	37%	33%
District- or teacher-developed math units for TK	45%	27%	26%
District- or teacher-developed literacy units for TK	42%	24%	23%
Kindergarten curriculum (not PreK)	26%	20%	18%
Whole child approach or philosophy for PreK	13%	13%	14%
Other	6%	14%	16%

Notes: Respondents could select more than one option; percentages do not add up to 100%. Whole child or comprehensive PreK curricula were defined as including published curricula such as Creative Curriculum and Frog Street. Whole child approach or philosophy for PreK included unscripted curricula such as emergent curriculum, Reggio Emilia approach, Montessori, or Waldorf. *N* = 1,414 LEAs.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

What assessments did LEAs use in TK?

Utilizing early childhood assessments can support educators in implementing developmentally appropriate learning practices, instruction, and supports within TK classrooms. California does not require specific assessments in TK classrooms. However, the DRDP, an observational assessment of children’s learning and development across multiple domains, is required in CSPP classrooms—including CSPP and TK combination classes—and for all 3- to 5-year-olds with individualized education plans that are served in LEAs, including those in TK or kindergarten.²⁹ The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), an observation instrument used to assess quality in learning settings, is also required in CSPP and TK combination classrooms.³⁰

LEAs were asked to report which child assessments, classroom assessments, and screeners were used in TK classrooms. Among the listed items, the most common one used in TK continued to be LEA-developed assessments, though they were used at a much lower rate in 2024–25 than at the start of expansion in 2022–23: 44% compared to 66%, respectively. Use of the DRDP, on the other hand, has increased notably statewide, with over one third of LEAs (34%) using it in TK in 2024–25. Usage of other assessments listed remained relatively consistent over the 3 years of available data, and, notably, about

1 in 10 LEAs did not use a common TK assessment across classrooms. However, reported LEA use of assessments does not indicate how many TK students received them; further research is needed to understand student-level assessment participation rates.

Language screeners were not specifically addressed in the survey. In 2023–24, LEAs were required to assess TK students’ English language proficiency on the English Learner Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC). Use of the ELPAC was suspended for TK at the start of the 2024–25 school year due to concerns about its appropriateness for 4-year-olds, and the state is now in the process of developing a list of approved screening instruments and implementation guidelines.³¹ As TK expansion continues, further examination of how LEAs are approaching language screeners may provide additional insight into how they can best identify and support multilingual learners.

Table 5. Assessments Used in TK, 2022–23 to 2024–25

TK assessment	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
LEA-based grade-level benchmarks and a report card	66%	43%	44%
Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)	20%	25%	34%
Educational Software for Guiding Instruction (ESGI) ^a	n/a	18%	19%
Work Sampling System	13%	13%	15%
Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) Early Literacy ^a	n/a	16%	14%
Ages and Stages Questionnaire	6%	8%	8%
BRIGANCE Early Childhood Screen	7%	7%	7%
Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) ^a	n/a	4%	5%
Teaching Strategies (TS) GOLD	2%	3%	2%
Other	23%	15%	15%
Unsure ^b	5%	n/a	n/a
The LEA did not use a common TK assessment	8%	13%	9%

^a These items were not included in the 2022–23 survey.

^b This item was not included in the 2023–24 or 2024–25 surveys.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one option; percentages do not add up to 100%.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

LEAs were also asked whether they provided professional development on child observational assessments to TK teachers during the 2024–25 school year, a practice that could support implementation of assessments with fidelity. More LEAs provided such professional development in 2024–25 compared to the prior school year: 81% versus 75%, respectively. The most common assessments for which LEAs provided professional learning correlate closely with the most common assessments used in TK:

- LEA-developed grade-level benchmarks (34%);
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (32%);
- Educational Software for Guiding Instruction (13%);
- STAR Early Literacy (13%); and
- Work Sampling System (11%).

How did LEAs support students’ social and emotional learning?

Supportive and developmentally appropriate learning environments impact early learners’ social, emotional, and academic development.³² Over the years of TK expansion, more LEAs have reported adopting strategies to support the development of social and emotional learning. In 2024–25, the most common strategies included play-based learning (82%), designing developmentally appropriate learning environments (73%), and engaging in developmental observations (61%). While these increases are promising, further research is needed to understand how these strategies to support students’ social and emotional learning are implemented in practice.

Table 6. Strategies Used to Support Social and Emotional Learning, 2022–23 to 2024–25

Strategy to support social and emotional learning	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Promoted play-based learning	69%	79%	82%
Designed developmentally appropriate learning environments	62%	70%	73%
Used developmental observations	32%	55%	61%
Developed lesson plans or curriculum on social and emotional learning	34%	58%	59%
Provided opportunities for staff development on social and emotional learning	22%	47%	47%
Offered open-ended, self-directed learning opportunities	19%	46%	48%
Provided training for staff on the Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) Pyramid Model	14%	20%	21%

Strategy to support social and emotional learning	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Implemented the CSEFEL Pyramid Model	5%	11%	14%
Other ^a	3%	n/a	n/a

^a This item was not included in the 2023–24 or 2024–25 surveys.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one option; percentages do not add up to 100%.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

Supporting Student Needs in TK

LEAs were asked several questions about how they supported specific TK students’ needs, including supporting students with disabilities and toileting needs for younger TK students.

How did LEAs support students with disabilities?

LEAs are federally required to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment necessary, and many students benefit from individualized learning and inclusive practices within general education classrooms.³³ Among the 11,736 TK classrooms operating in 2024–25, 87% were reported as inclusive of students with disabilities—the same percentage as 2023–24.

In 2024–25, a higher percentage of LEAs reported providing adaptations to instructional materials to support students with disabilities than the prior year: 71% versus 66%, respectively. For the remaining strategies listed in [Table 7](#), LEAs reported a broad increase in their use between 2022–23 and 2023–24 with consistent use in 2024–25.

Over 1 in 10 LEAs reported challenges in supporting the wide range of students’ developmental, behavioral, and academic needs, many of whom cited challenges in supporting students with disabilities and/or developmental delays and a need for additional resources and staffing. One respondent from a small, suburban charter school uplifted teachers’ challenges in navigating special education identification processes and supporting in-classroom differentiation:

The rise in students displaying early childhood markers for disabilities or developmental delays means teachers must navigate a complex landscape of screening, referral, and the initial stages of providing specialized support before formal identification processes are complete. This demands high levels of differentiated instruction and specialized training.

Table 7. Instructional Practices Used to Support Children With Disabilities, 2022–23 to 2024–25

Instructional practice	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Provided adaptations to instructional materials	64%	66%	71%
Provided additional staff to support participation in instruction	47%	56%	56%
Implemented Universal Design for Learning	42%	48%	51%
Implemented social-emotional strategies	40%	48%	50%
Provided specialized services	42%	48%	48%
Other	2%	4%	4%

Notes: Respondents could select more than one option; percentages do not add up to 100%.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

How did LEAs support students’ toileting needs?

With younger and younger TK students coming in, supporting toileting independence has risen as a common challenge among LEAs throughout expansion.³⁴ LEAs’ strategies to support toileting in TK classrooms have remained relatively consistent over the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years, though there has been a steady increase in the percentage of LEAs reporting having dedicated staff to support independent toileting skills (see Table 8).

Similar to prior years, LEAs flagged toileting as a top challenge facing UPK implementation. LEAs described multiple, interconnected issues, including the lack of classrooms with attached restrooms, insufficiently sized toilets, and limited diapering facilities. Toileting needs also contributed to staffing strain, particularly when assistant teachers were required to leave classrooms to support students, reducing instructional support for other children. Some LEAs additionally noted a need for clearer guidance on partnering with families around toileting expectations and responsibilities. A respondent from a small, rural school district shared:

One of the most significant challenges our school anticipates in the implementation of universal prekindergarten (UPK) is supporting students who are not yet fully potty trained. In our small classrooms staffed by only one teacher and one aide, addressing the personal care needs of multiple children can strain instructional time and compromise the learning environment for all students. This is especially pressing given the younger age of transitional kindergarten (TK) students entering the UPK system.

Table 8. Strategies to Support Toileting, 2022–23 to 2024–25

Strategy to support toileting	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
We share or will be sharing resources or information with families about how our school sites will approach toileting assistance.	50%	56%	56%
We have adopted or will be adopting new practices to support all children having access to additional clothing and/or toileting supplies as necessary.	46%	54%	54%
We already have dedicated staff to support toileting and communicate regularly with parents about how our school sites provide toileting assistance for children who need it.	34%	41%	50%
We are or will be engaging in additional negotiation with our local labor organizations to assign duties related to toileting assistance to new or additional staff.	19%	24%	22%
We are planning to address toileting with our community on an upcoming meeting agenda.	16%	16%	12%

Notes: Respondents could select more than one option; percentages do not add up to 100%.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

Staffing TK Classrooms

By the 2025–26 school year, LEAs receiving funding for TK classes must staff TK classrooms with a lead teacher who has both a teaching credential and meets statutory requirements of having at least 24 units of coursework in early childhood education or child development, a Child Development Teacher Permit, or LEA-determined equivalent professional experience.³⁵ Holders of the PK–3 ECE Specialist Credential meet both the credentialing and statutory requirements to be assigned to teach in a TK classroom. TK classrooms will also be required to have an average child–adult ratio of 10 children to 1 adult, lowered from the ratio of 12 children to 1 adult required during the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years. LEAs who do not meet the required average child–adult ratio face funding penalties.³⁶

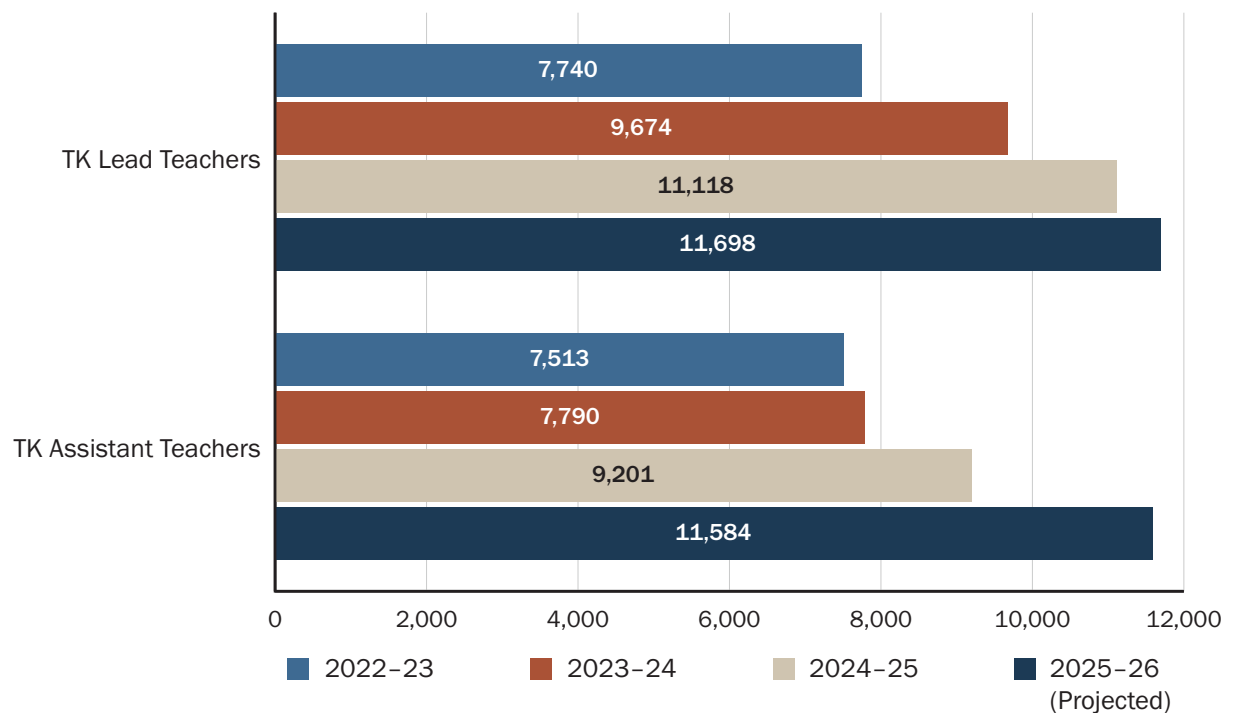
The expansion of TK eligibility and the lowered child–adult ratios have required the addition of a substantial number of TK lead teachers and second adults in TK classrooms (referred to as assistant teachers throughout this report). Overall, data indicate relative stability in LEAs' ability to fill both TK lead and assistant teacher positions as staffing needs have increased, though projections for 2025–26 suggest potential challenges in filling assistant teacher positions at full TK expansion.

How many TK teachers do LEAs need?

Throughout TK expansion, LEAs have reported increased staffing needs for TK lead teachers and assistant teachers. During each year of expansion, LEAs have reported needing between 1,400 and 2,000 additional TK lead teachers with each increase in age eligibility (see Figure 5). The projected additional need for TK teachers at full expansion in 2025–26 was comparatively small, with LEAs reporting needing an additional 580 teachers for the following school year.

Staffing needs for assistant teachers have also grown between 2022–23 and 2024–25. (In these 3 years, the required average child–adult ratio was 12 children to 1 adult.) LEAs needed about 1,500 additional assistant teachers in the 2024–25 school year, and they projected needing almost 2,400 additional assistant teachers for 2025–26, when LEAs are required to have an average ratio of 10 children to 1 adult.

Figure 5. TK Staffing Needs, 2022–23 to 2025–26



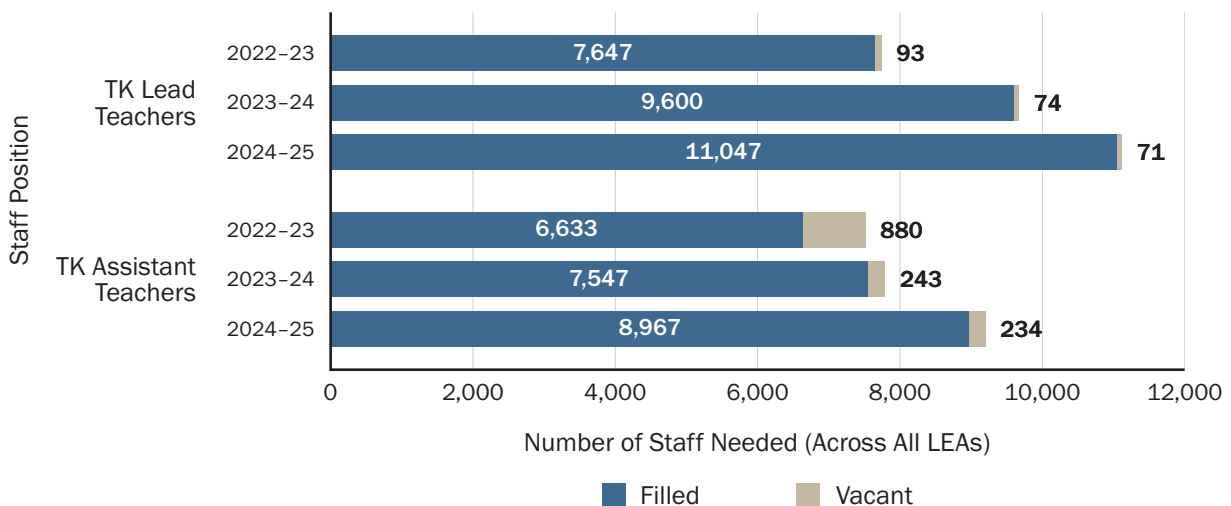
Note: Data for 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 are the LEA-reported number of staff positions needed in the 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 surveys to meet actual enrollment needs each year. Data for 2025–26 are LEAs' estimated staffing needs based on projected enrollment for the 2025–26 school year.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

Have LEAs been able to staff TK classroom positions?

LEAs report having kept vacancies relatively low in 2024–25, with a 1% TK lead teacher vacancy rate and a 3% assistant teacher vacancy rate. Vacancy rates are similar to 2023–24, although the total number of TK lead and assistant teachers has grown.

Figure 6. TK Staffing Needs and Vacancies at the Beginning of 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25



Note: TK assistant teachers were referred to on the survey as the “second adult” in a TK classroom.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

It is unclear why the TK assistant teacher vacancy rate improved significantly between 2022–23 and 2023–24. Continued monitoring of these data will be important, as vacancy rates may change in the 2025–26 school year due to the large increase in assistant teachers needed to meet new ratio requirements. In open-ended responses, LEAs reported conflicting opinions on the new 10:1 average child–adult ratio requirements. Many noted concerns with being able to meet the 10:1 average child–adult ratio, citing its impact on LEAs’ other instructional services. A respondent from a small, suburban school district noted:

Shifting current staff from schoolwide services to TK in order to meet the 1:10 ratio ... has caused a reduction of small group intervention services provided to K–5 students.

On the other hand, some LEAs discussed a need for even smaller ratios to better support early learners’ needs, which would require additional teachers and consequently, additional funding. A respondent from a medium-sized, urban school district stated:

[A ratio of] 1 to 10 is not enough adults for TK. A 1:6 ratio would serve students better, but funding limits our ability to provide adequate staffing levels for this age group.

Did LEAs have enough qualified TK staff?

In 2024–25, 94% reported having enough fully qualified TK lead teachers who met upcoming requirements that will begin in 2025–26 (i.e., they will have a valid teaching credential in addition to 24 units of coursework in early childhood education or child development, a Child Development Teacher Permit, or equivalent professional experience). This is an increase from 91% in 2023–24.

LEAs were asked to report the number of teachers who met the various options for the early learning requirement to teach TK, listed below (percentages do not add to 100% because teachers may qualify under more than one criteria). Among all 2024–25 TK teachers statewide, LEAs reported that:

- 51% had 24 units of ECE, child development, or both;
- 45% had LEA-determined professional experience;
- 24% had a child development permit or higher; and
- 29% were exempt from the requirement because they taught TK prior to July 1, 2015.³⁷

While almost all LEAs reported having enough fully qualified TK lead teachers, many noted challenges in hiring TK lead and assistant teachers due to a limited and competitive pool of candidates with early childhood expertise. According to a respondent from a small, suburban school district, this difficulty has limited the LEA's ability to expand and meet local demand for UPK:

The pool of qualified candidates in the region remains very limited. The competition for credentialed early learning teachers is high, and many potential candidates are drawn to districts or agencies that can offer higher pay, stronger pipelines, or less geographically isolated work settings. At the same time, there has been a marked expansion of need in [our region] for early childhood services. Families are eager for more seats, but the challenge of staffing classrooms with educators who meet both credential and quality standards has created barriers to scaling up quickly and equitably. Without addressing these teacher workforce shortages, the full promise of UPK in [our region] will be difficult to realize.

Professional Development for TK Teachers

Teachers of young children need a range of knowledge and skills that prepare them to support children's physical, social and emotional, and academic development. They must be able to support language, literacy, and math development; establish safe, caring, and positive relationships with children and families; and recognize and effectively support children's culture, language, and individual needs.³⁸

This section of the report provides findings on the topics and modalities of professional development offered to TK lead and assistant teachers throughout the 2024–25 school year. The majority of LEAs continue to provide professional development opportunities to TK lead and assistant teachers, as well as coaching for TK lead teachers. However, more information would be needed to understand the frequency, modality, and quality of professional development received by these teachers.

What professional development did LEAs offer TK teachers and assistant teachers?

Almost all LEAs (97%) provided early childhood professional development to TK lead teachers, and 85% of LEAs provided professional development to TK assistant teachers.

The most common professional development topics provided to TK lead teachers were literacy and language development, social-emotional development, children’s math and science development, effective adult–child interactions, and creating developmentally informed environments (see Table 9). The most common topics provided to TK assistant teachers were effective adult–child interactions, social-emotional development, serving children with disabilities in inclusive settings, literacy and language development, and creating developmentally informed environments.

Table 9. Professional Development Opportunities Offered to TK Staff in 2024–25

Professional development topic	Percentage of LEAs that offered professional development to:	
	TK lead teachers	TK assistant teachers
Literacy and language development	68%	34%
Social-emotional development	64%	38%
Math and science	54%	26%
Effective adult–child interactions	53%	51%
Creating developmentally informed environments	52%	33%
Serving children with disabilities in inclusive settings	50%	37%
Curriculum selection and implementation	49%	19%
Child assessments to inform instruction	49%	24%
Playful learning across the P–3 continuum	46%	30%
Support for multilingual learners	35%	22%
Engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families	27%	17%
Implicit bias and culturally and linguistically responsive practice	26%	18%
Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma- and healing-informed practice	22%	18%
Early childhood behavioral health	19%	14%
Other	4%	6%
Not offered	3%	15%

Notes: Respondents could select more than one option; percentages do not add up to 100%. *N* = 1,414 LEAs.

Source: California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

Professional development survey data suggest that LEAs are increasingly focusing on developmentally appropriate and inclusive practices in TK. When comparing data across the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years, a greater percentage of LEAs provided professional development in 2024–25 to TK lead teachers in the following areas:

- serving children with disabilities in inclusive settings (+5 percentage points),
- creating developmentally informed environments (+5 percentage points),
- social-emotional development (+4 percentage points),
- math and science (+4 percentage points), and
- playful learning (+4 percentage points).

For TK assistant teachers, a greater percentage of LEAs provided professional development in 2024–25 than in 2023–24 in the following areas:

- serving children with disabilities (+6 percentage points), and
- creating developmentally informed environments (+5 percentage points).

Did LEAs offer coaching to TK teachers?

Coaching, or providing teachers with collaborative opportunities for observation, modeling, feedback, and reflection from an expert, can be an effective professional learning practice if implemented well.³⁹

More LEAs reported offering coaching to TK lead teachers in 2024–25 than in 2023–24 (83% vs. 78%, respectively). The top coaching topics were similar to the previous year:

- literacy and language development (49%),
- social-emotional development (44%),
- effective adult–child interactions (44%),
- creating developmentally informed environments (41%),
- math and science (38%), and
- serving children with disabilities (38%).

In open-ended responses, LEAs highlighted a need for professional development, particularly related to developmentally appropriate curricula, assessments, and pedagogy. The multitude of knowledge and skills TK teachers need, coupled with the eligibility expansion and logistical challenges, have posed challenges to some LEAs in keeping up with needed professional development. A respondent from a large, suburban school district noted:

Our TK program has grown tremendously over the years; we started with just 15 TK classrooms and now have 78. We have some TK teachers who are more veteran and who have received a lot of professional development over the expansion phases, and we have brand-new-to-TK teachers who need to be taught about the grade level. We find that while most of our new-to-TK teachers are enthusiastic and eager to learn, there is a big learning curve regarding child development, [developmentally appropriate] practices, whole child philosophy, etc. We

have several systems in place to support the workforce (new teachers paired with mentor TK teachers, full-day release days for professional development, etc.), but it is challenging as we are building capacity while they are in the role.

Finally, at the intersection of professional development and staffing challenges, some LEAs noted difficulties in securing substitute teachers, hindering their ability to provide coverage for teachers to engage in planning, collaboration, and professional development. A medium-sized, suburban school district respondent shared:

The biggest challenges have been around having protected time and [substitute] coverage for TK [or] TK-3 teacher training on developmentally appropriate practice. With such a large teaching team, it requires multiple days of release for whole grade-level training due to sub shortages to cover the releases.

Universal Prekindergarten Implementation in Local Education Agencies

In addition to transitional kindergarten (TK), local education agencies (LEAs) can provide other early learning options within California's universal prekindergarten (UPK) system. While all school districts are required to offer TK, those with qualifying students—such as students who meet income-eligibility requirements for programs—can operate California State Preschool Program (CSPP) or Head Start classrooms. Additionally, LEAs can operate other locally funded early learning programs, such as district-funded or special education preschool programs.

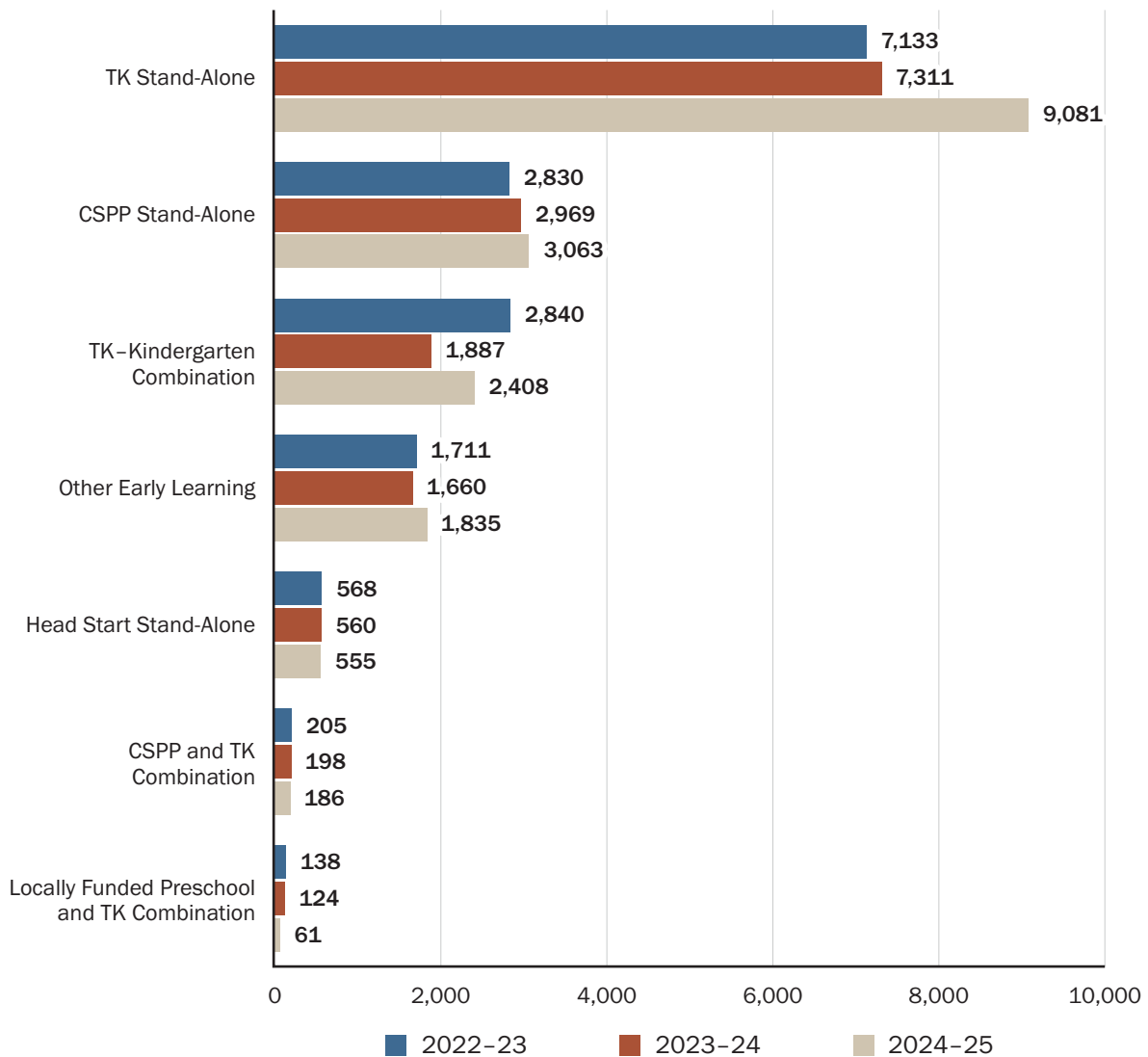
While LEAs are one of many early learning providers in California, they serve a large portion of preschool-age children and play a large role in UPK expansion across the state. This section of the report shares findings on how LEAs have continued UPK implementation in 2024–25, including UPK service delivery models across the suite of early learning programs offered within LEAs, staffing, professional development, and challenges and needs.

UPK Service Delivery Models

In the 2024–25 school year, 24% of LEAs who offered TK also reported operating CSPP classrooms, whether stand-alone or combined with TK. Four percent of LEAs reported operating at least one Head Start classroom, and 16% operated another early learning program in a stand-alone classroom or combined with TK. These percentages remained stable compared the 2023–24 school year.

Overall, California LEAs operated a total of 17,189 UPK classrooms in 2024–25, inclusive of TK, CSPP, Head Start, and other early learning programs. This is a notable increase from the 14,709 operated in 2023–24. Much of this increase came from additional TK classrooms, both stand-alone and TK–kindergarten combination, though we also observe slight increases in CSPP and other early learning classrooms (see [Figure 7](#)). The changes in the number of TK–kindergarten classrooms over 3 years of data stem primarily from inconsistencies in how non-classroom-based (i.e., virtual) charter schools reported classroom data.⁴⁰

Figure 7. Number of UPK Classrooms in LEAs by Type, 2022–23 to 2024–25



Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

How many UPK classrooms were dual language immersion?

About half of California’s preschoolers are dual language learners and live in a home where a language other than English is spoken.⁴¹ Research in California early education classrooms has found that increased home language use benefits dual language learners’ growth across learning domains in both languages, and learning more than one language during early childhood results in significant cognitive, linguistic, academic, and social advantages in the future.⁴²

In 2024–25, 7% of LEA-operated UPK classrooms were dual language immersion, consistent with 2023–24 data (see [Table 10](#)). Year-over-year data show sharp increases in the percentage of dual language immersion classes in CSPP–TK combination classes and sharp decreases in TK–kindergarten combination classes; it is unclear whether these shifts reflect reporting inconsistencies or broader statewide trends. More data are needed to understand the extent to which early learners are taught within dual language immersion settings, as well as the types of supports provided for multilingual students within primarily English-speaking classrooms.

Table 10. Percentage of UPK Classrooms That LEAs Reported Were Dual Language Immersion in 2024–25, by Classroom Type

UPK classroom type	2023–24	2024–25
TK stand-alone classes	7%	6%
TK–kindergarten combination classes	18%	8%
CSPP and TK combination classes	9%	20%
Locally funded preschool and TK combination classes ^a	2%	7%
CSPP stand-alone classes	5%	6%
Head Start stand-alone classes ^a	4%	6%
Other early learning classes	3%	8%
Total	7%	7%

^a The number of dual language immersion classrooms was small in these categories (ranging from 3 to 37 across both years of data). Percentages for these categories may be less stable and should be interpreted with caution.

Source: California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

How many UPK classrooms were inclusive of students with disabilities?

Most (84%) of LEA-operated UPK classrooms in 2024–25 were inclusive of students with disabilities, similar to the 83% reported in 2023–24. The percentage of inclusive classrooms remained relatively steady between 2023–24 and 2024–25 across classroom types. While a high percentage of LEA-reported classrooms are inclusive of students with disabilities, only approximately 34% of California’s preschool children with disabilities are served in inclusive environments, lower than the 59% national average and ranking the state among the five lowest nationwide.⁴³

Table 11. Percentage of UPK Classrooms That LEAs Reported Were Inclusive of Students With Disabilities in 2024–25, by Classroom Type

UPK classroom type	2023–24	2024–25
TK stand-alone classes	87%	87%
TK–kindergarten combination classes	88%	85%
CSPP and TK combination classes	92%	96%
Locally funded preschool and TK combination classes ^a	81%	92%
CSPP stand-alone classes	79%	81%
Head Start stand-alone classes	78%	85%
Other early learning classes	71%	71%
Total	83%	84%

^a The sharp increase in the percentage of inclusive classrooms within locally funded and TK combination classes is largely driven by a substantial decline in the total number of locally funded and TK combination classes across the state (124 in 2023–24 to 61 in 2024–25).

Source: California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

UPK Staffing

In the survey, LEAs were also asked to provide staffing data for the CSPP and Head Start teachers they employed. CSPP and Head Start teachers on LEA campuses primarily teach 3- and 4-year-olds and have different qualification requirements than TK lead teachers (see [Table 12](#)). Lead CSPP and Head Start teachers earn about half the wages of lead TK teachers.⁴⁴

Table 12. Lead Teacher Requirements in TK, CSPP, and Head Start

Program	Minimum teacher qualifications
TK	Teaching credential plus 24 units of ECE, a Child Development Teacher Permit, or equivalent professional experience
CSPP	Child Development Associate Teacher Permit ^a
Head Start	Associate’s degree (50% nationally must have a bachelor’s degree)

^a A Child Development Associate Teacher Permit requires 12 units of ECE and at least 50 days of early childhood instructional experience.

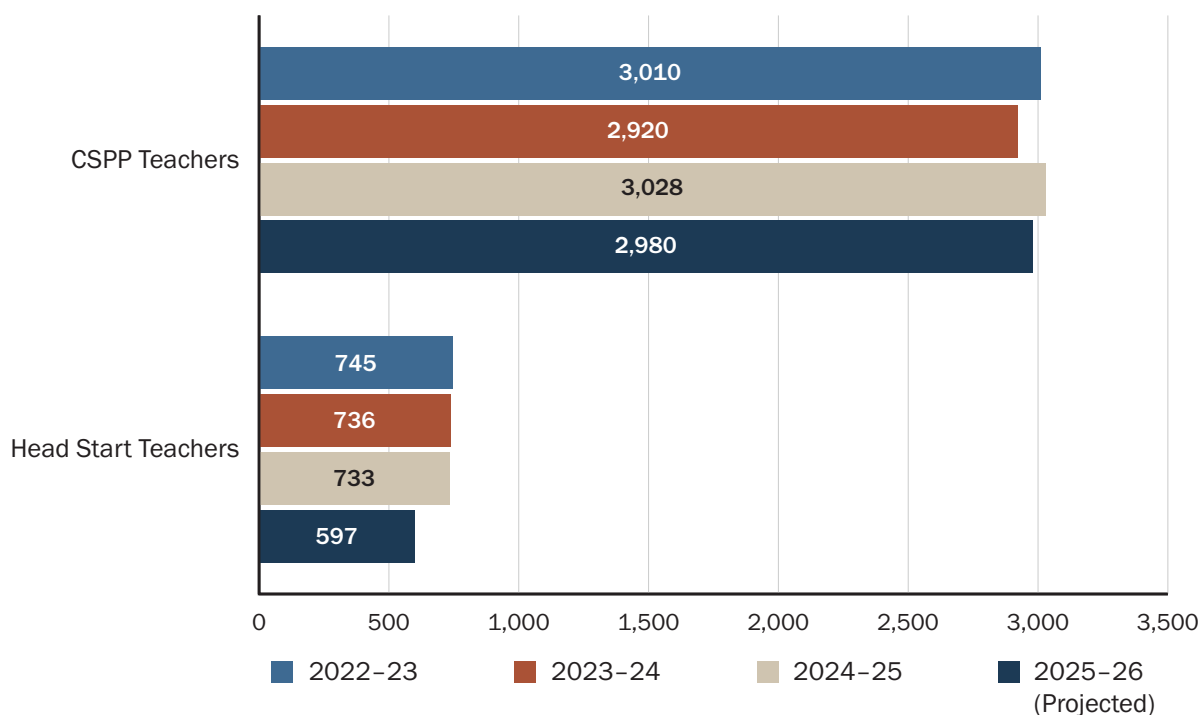
Source: California Education Code § 48000(g)(4) (2024); California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2023). *Child development permits (CL-797)*. (accessed 03/06/2025); U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (n.d.). *Head Start policy and regulations: Staff qualifications and competency requirements*. (accessed 12/27/2025).

The data presented here only represent CSPP and Head Start teachers in programs operated by LEAs, not all CSPP and Head Start teachers in the state.

How many CSPP and Head Start teachers do LEAs need?

Because not all LEAs operate CSPP or Head Start contracts, total staffing needs are much lower statewide than for TK classrooms. CSPP staffing needs have remained relatively steady over the past few years of UPK implementation. Meanwhile, LEAs project a notable decrease in projected Head Start staffing for the 2025–26 school year (see Figure 8), consistent with declining Head Start enrollment statewide.⁴⁵

Figure 8. LEAs’ CSPP and Head Start Staffing Needs, 2022–23 to 2025–26



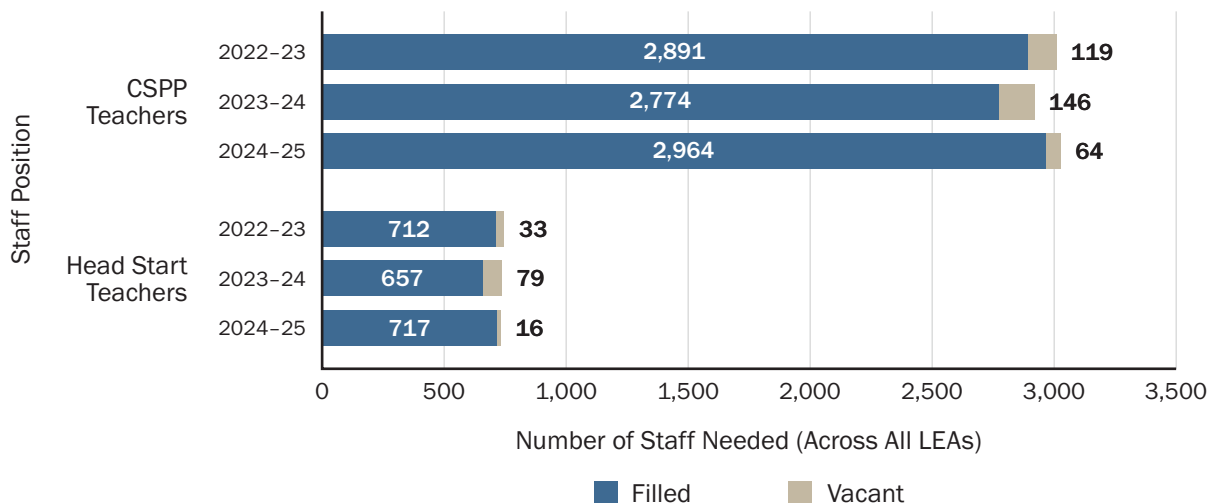
Note: Data for 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 are the LEA-reported number of staff positions needed in the 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 surveys to meet actual enrollment needs each year. Data for 2025–26 are LEAs’ estimated staffing needs based on projected enrollment for the 2025–26 school year.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

Have LEAs been able to staff CSPP and Head Start classrooms?

Year-over-year data between the 2022–23 and 2024–25 school years show some fluctuations in vacancy rates across LEAs’ CSPP and Head Start staffing, with a spike in Head Start vacancies during the 2023–24 school year. Staffing vacancies were lower in 2024–25, with a 2% vacancy rate across both CSPP and Head Start programs.

Figure 9. CSPP and Head Start Staffing Needs and Vacancies at the Beginning of 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25



Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

While the majority of LEAs’ reported staffing challenges focused on recruitment and retention of TK lead and assistant teachers, several noted challenges in hiring and retaining early childhood teachers in their other early learning programs. According to one respondent from a medium-sized, urban school district:

The greatest challenge [the district] is facing with the implementation of UPK has been staffing vacancies created as ECE teachers transition to TK and ensuring that we hire highly qualified staff to replace them.

Conversely, another respondent from a medium-sized, suburban school district noted dissatisfaction among its center-based preschool teachers due to limited opportunities to transition to TK and enrollment shifts:

Preschool teachers see TK teachers who are not as well trained as them in serving this age, not providing the same level of service they believe they would and are upset the TK pathway for a preschool teacher was not as accessible to them. They are also adjusting to serving mostly 3-year-olds in preschool.

Professional Development for School Leaders

School leaders overseeing early childhood education programs need specialized knowledge and skills in early childhood development and instructional alignment across preschool through 3rd grade—particularly as younger 4-year-olds are entering schools due to TK expansion. However, many California administrators do not have early learning–specific training or expertise and would benefit from early childhood professional development.

What professional development did LEAs offer school leaders?

In the 2024–25 school year, 91% of LEAs offered at least one professional development on early childhood topics to site leaders and principals, consistent with 2023–24.

The most common professional development topics for school leaders were literacy and language development, social-emotional development, serving students with disabilities in inclusive settings, effective adult–child interactions, and curriculum selection and implementation (see [Table 13](#)).

Table 13. Percentage of LEAs Offering Professional Development Opportunities to School Leaders, 2022–23 to 2024–25

Early childhood professional development topic	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Literacy and language development	39%	47%	51%
Social-emotional development	35%	47%	49%
Serving children with disabilities in inclusive settings	37%	46%	48%
Effective adult–child interactions	34%	45%	45%
Curriculum selection and implementation	37%	42%	43%
Creating developmentally informed environments	34%	38%	43%
Child assessments to inform instruction	29%	39%	42%
Math and science	28%	34%	37%
Playful learning across the P–3 continuum ^a	n/a	34%	37%
Support for multilingual learners	23%	30%	30%
Implicit bias and culturally and linguistically responsive practice	25%	29%	27%
Engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families	21%	28%	27%
Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma- and healing-informed practice	25%	26%	22%
Early childhood behavioral health	13%	18%	17%
Other	3%	3%	3%
Not offered	15%	9%	9%

^a This item was not included in the 2022–23 survey.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one option; percentages do not add up to 100%.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

Through open-ended responses, many LEAs flagged a need for school leaders and administrators to receive targeted professional development alongside TK teachers in early childhood topics. A respondent from a small, rural school district stated:

The biggest challenge is training staff, administration and teachers, in developmentally appropriate TK programs that fit the Preschool Learning Foundations. There is a range of program ideas among staff that range from a fully play-based program with limited teacher instruction (whether through play or structured activities) to a program that looks more like a kindergarten classroom. Training and support are needed for site-level administration and teachers on developing programs that are age appropriate and provide the appropriate curriculum.

Challenges and Technical Assistance Needs

What were LEAs' biggest challenges in UPK implementation?

In open-ended responses, local education agencies (LEAs) identified a wide range of challenges related to universal prekindergarten (UPK) implementation, similar to the challenges identified in prior years of data.⁴⁶ Although the survey was intended to cover the 2024–25 school year, data were collected in fall of the 2025–26 school year. LEAs' open-ended responses thus touched on implementation challenges faced in 2025–26, the first year of full transitional kindergarten (TK) expansion. While numerous challenges, along with illustrative quotes, are discussed in earlier sections of this report, this section highlights overarching themes that emerged across LEAs' responses, including both previously noted and new issues.

Key challenges related to UPK facilities; staffing; adopting developmentally appropriate practice, curriculum, and assessments; and supporting independent toileting persisted as top challenges in UPK implementation. Additionally, LEAs cited emerging concerns related to inadequate funding and resources; supporting the needs of younger students; unpredictable enrollment; and impacts of TK expansion on other preschool programs.

Facilities. About 1 in 4 LEAs cited facilities as a top challenge in UPK implementation. Responses most often centered on lack of physical space, including insufficient numbers of classrooms, the absence of restrooms within classrooms, and limited access to developmentally appropriate outdoor play areas (see [TK Facilities](#)).

Staffing. One in 4 LEAs also cited workforce and staffing challenges, including difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified TK lead and assistant teachers, concerns with child–adult ratio requirements, and challenges in securing substitute teachers (see [Staffing TK Classrooms](#)). Several LEAs also reported challenges in retaining and supporting their educators in non-TK classrooms (see [UPK Staffing](#)).

Developmentally appropriate curricula, assessments, and pedagogy. Approximately 1 in 5 LEAs cited challenges related to developmentally appropriate curriculum, assessments, and pedagogy. Additionally, though more LEAs statewide are providing professional development opportunities, many LEAs reported professional development needs to support teachers in these topics. LEAs described difficulties across a variety of implementation areas.

First, LEAs noted that the inclusion of younger 4-year-olds has required significant adjustments in teachers' mindsets, expectations, classroom management practices, and approaches. These adjustments include challenges in balancing developmentally appropriate practices with the structures and expectations of older elementary settings, which LEAs note require additional professional development and support. A respondent from a small, rural school district shared:

Our biggest challenge is shifting credentialed teacher mindset to a true early learning mindset. This lack of shift affects the social-emotional learning and adjustment of students as well as developmental academic progress.

Another respondent from a small, suburban school district noted:

Curriculum alignment is another hurdle, as districts must bridge preschool learning standards with K–12 expectations. Teachers are tasked with balancing developmentally appropriate practices while preparing students for kindergarten readiness, which requires intentional planning, collaboration, and professional development.

Some LEAs expressed difficulties in vertically aligning curriculum, assessments, and student expectations across grade levels. A respondent from a medium-sized, suburban school district stated:

The biggest challenge our LEA is facing with the implementation of UPK is ensuring [preschool]–3 coherence and embedding developmentally appropriate practices that not only align with TK and preschool but also extend through kindergarten and into the early elementary grades. This requires deliberate coordination across grade levels to create a seamless transition for students, ensuring that instructional practices, learning environments, and assessments build upon each other in a coherent and continuous way. Additionally, aligning curriculum and professional development for educators to support this progression has been critical but challenging, particularly when balancing the diverse developmental needs of children as they move from preschool to early elementary grades.

Other LEAs identified challenges in horizontal alignment across various programs that serve preschool-age children such as CSPP, Head Start, and expanded learning. A respondent from a medium-sized, suburban school district shared:

While some schools have made strong progress in aligning preschool and TK programs, others still operate in silos, with little integration between the two. Staffing inconsistencies, limited professional development in early childhood education, and varied enrollment capacities have resulted in uneven access and fragmented programming.

A small, rural school district respondent shared their concerns with developmentally appropriate expanded learning opportunities:

The biggest challenge [our district] is facing with the implementation of UPK is providing developmentally appropriate programming within full-day and extended learning models. As the district expands full-day TK programs and integrates extended learning opportunities through [the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program], aligning curriculum, daily schedules, and resources to meet the developmental needs of young learners has required careful planning and adaptation. This includes ensuring that instructional practices remain play-based and age appropriate throughout the extended day, as well as addressing practical considerations such as toilet training support, rest time, and access to appropriate facilities and materials. Balancing these developmental needs with staffing, facilities, and program requirements continues to be a central area of focus for successful UPK implementation.

Toileting. Consistent with prior years, toileting remained a significant implementation challenge as TK eligibility expanded to younger children. One in 7 LEAs flagged toileting challenges related to lack of accessible and appropriately sized restrooms and staffing strain (see [How did LEAs support students' toileting needs?](#)).

Funding and resources. Funding and resource constraints continued to pose challenges for implementation, with 1 in 8 LEAs identifying inadequate funding as a key barrier. LEAs pointed to insufficient funding for facility expansion or modification, staffing—both within TK classrooms and for administrative oversight—and sustained investments in professional development, curriculum, and wraparound services. A respondent from a medium-sized, suburban school district shared:

It takes a lot of money to provide high-quality education for our youngest students. We are tasked with building and maintaining facilities, providing manipulatives for hands-on learning, staffing at a 1:10 ratio, professional learning for adults, and creating inclusive education for all. We have the willingness and the know-how to create the best educational experience for our UPK students. We lack the ability to sustain those best practices and systems without significant additional monetary investment from the state.

Concerns about long-term funding sustainability were common, particularly in the context of fluctuating TK enrollment. According to a respondent from a small, rural school district:

Due to the rural nature of the school, there are very few, if any, TK students enrolling in the program each year. In 2023–24 and 2024–25, no students enrolled, and in 2025–26 just one student enrolled. To ensure the proper adult to student ratio for 2025–26, we have hired a brand-new TK part-time aide position. This was made possible through the use of UPK funds. Looking ahead, though, our concern is whether funding will be available to sustain this position. As we are planning to expend the funds completely in 2025–26, and with such low enrollment, we cannot rely on TK add-on funding to support the position. This means the position will likely lead to sacrifices elsewhere in the general fund budget.

Basic aid districts emphasized that the lack of additional funding for TK students forced difficult trade-offs, such as increasing class sizes in other grade levels or staffing reductions in other areas. A respondent from a small, rural school district shared:

The biggest challenge in our district is the lack of dedicated, ongoing state funding to maintain a high-quality TK program that our students and families need. While we support the state's goal of ensuring all 4-year-olds get a strong start, the reality is that, without new resources for this new grade level, we are doing so at the expense of other essential services. Due to projected deficit spending in future years, we are looking at staffing reductions in the future.

Supporting student needs. More than 1 in 10 LEAs reported challenges supporting the wide range of student needs present in UPK classrooms. In addition to challenges supporting students with disabilities and/or developmental delays (see [How did LEAs support students with disabilities?](#)), LEAs described behavioral challenges and wider developmental variation due to the addition of younger 4-year-olds in TK, requiring educators to adopt new behavioral support strategies and differentiate instruction and classroom management approaches. According to a respondent from a small, urban charter school:

Our greatest challenge with UPK implementation is supporting an increasing number of students entering school with significant behavioral and self-regulation needs, including defiance, aggression, and eloping from the classroom. Many of our youngest learners are

arriving without prior structured preschool experience, which has resulted in a wider range of social-emotional and behavioral readiness than our current staffing model was designed to support.

Enrollment. More than 1 in 10 LEAs cited various enrollment challenges. Some LEAs reported unpredictable enrollment, complicating long-term planning for facilities, staffing, and sustainable funding. A respondent from a small, rural school district shared:

The biggest challenge our LEA is facing with the implementation of universal prekindergarten (UPK) is predicting how many students will actually enroll. Because enrollment depends on a wide range of variables, it is difficult to forecast with accuracy. This uncertainty impacts:

- Staffing: Hiring enough qualified TK/UPK teachers and aides without over- or under-staffing.
- Facilities: Planning for adequate classrooms, furniture, and age-appropriate learning environments.
- Transportation and Support Services: Anticipating demand for buses, nutrition services, and special education supports.
- Budgeting: Balancing state funding allocations with fluctuating enrollment, since funding often follows actual student counts.

Others experienced low enrollment due to overall district enrollment declines or limited family awareness of TK, sometimes resulting in combination classes. A respondent from a small, rural school district shared:

Each year, we have a minimal number of incoming transitional kindergarten students, which makes it challenging to staff and structure a complete TK program while maintaining compliance with adult-child ratio requirements, credentialing expectations, and curriculum mandates. Recruiting and retaining qualified staff for such a small cohort is particularly challenging, as the cost of staffing often outweighs the funding generated by the number of enrolled students. Additionally, in a small community like ours, many families opt for homeschooling, private care, or neighboring programs, which further reduces the consistency of our TK enrollment. This creates challenges in planning long-term staffing, scheduling, and professional development while still striving to provide equitable access to high-quality early learning.

In contrast, some growing LEAs described demand for TK that exceeded available capacity. A medium-sized, rural school district respondent stated:

Our biggest challenge is predicting each year how much our TK program will grow. This year, we had to collapse two kinder classes and move those teachers to TK right when school was starting. As of right now, we do have room to house more TK classes, but having to make those calls ahead of time has been an issue.

When reflecting upon enrollment challenges, some LEAs pointed to growth opportunities in family engagement and outreach practices. A respondent from a small, suburban school district shared:

Some families may be unaware of UPK opportunities or may prefer alternative options such as private preschools, child care centers, or Head Start programs. Coordinating enrollment across multiple providers can lead to confusion or duplication, making outreach and strong community partnerships essential to ensure equitable access and maximize participation.

With TK now at full expansion and all 4-year-olds eligible statewide, enrollment patterns may stabilize over time, which could ease some of the planning and staffing challenges described. Understanding how families navigate and make enrollment decisions across UPK programs could provide further insight into the challenges described above.

Impacts on other preschool programs. Finally, some LEAs flagged concerns about how TK expansion affected other early learning programs such as CSPP, including staffing and enrollment shifts away from district- or community-operated preschool programs. A respondent from a small, rural school district shared its concerns:

TK has also emptied out our CSPP state preschool program to the extent we won't be able to continue to operate it in the future.

What kinds of technical assistance do LEAs request?

LEAs were asked to identify the types of technical assistance they need to support UPK implementation. Across the years of UPK expansion, LEAs have consistently identified a broad range of support needs, though the relative urgency of specific topics has shifted over time (see [Table 14](#)).

Consistent with prior years, LEAs continued to request technical assistance focused on building staff knowledge and capacity, including coaching and mentoring, professional development for site leaders, professional learning related to literacy and language development, and opportunities for classroom observation and demonstration lessons. At the same time, some previously acute needs—such as guidance on facility modifications, increasing UPK enrollment and family awareness, and supporting toileting—appear to have eased somewhat, although a substantial share of LEAs continue to seek assistance in these areas.

Table 14. Technical Assistance Topics Most Requested by LEAs, 2022–23 to 2024–25

Technical assistance topic	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Coaching and mentoring	52%	52%	47%
Creating professional learning opportunities to provide site leaders with more early childhood knowledge	49%	50%	43%
Encouraging purposeful play, choice, social interactions, and collaboration	44%	48%	43%
Guidance on effective classroom organization practices and behavior management strategies	40%	43%	42%
Guidance on modifying an elementary school classroom to serve young children	56%	57%	42%

Technical assistance topic	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Classroom observations and demonstration lessons with colleagues	44%	45%	42%
Support for parent surveys	51%	47%	41%
Creating inclusive classrooms, including implementing Universal Design for Learning	44%	44%	40%
Professional development opportunities: Literacy and language development	50%	47%	40%
Balancing child-initiated and teacher-guided activities	43%	42%	40%
Guidance on best practices for smooth transitions through the P–3 continuum	38%	42%	39%
Increasing UPK enrollment and parent awareness of programs	47%	49%	39%
Professional development opportunities: Math and science	46%	47%	38%
Professional development opportunities: Playful learning across the P–3 continuum ^a	n/a	40%	38%
Professional development opportunities: Social-emotional development	45%	45%	37%
Guidance on supporting students with disabilities	38%	40%	36%
Practices to address the increase in children who will need toileting assistance ^a	n/a	45%	36%

^a This item was not included in the 2022–23 survey.

Note: Respondents could select more than one option; percentages do not add up to 100%. Respondents were asked to identify desired technical assistance among a list of about 70 items. This table reflects the most commonly requested technical assistance items across 3 years of data.

Sources: California Department of Education. (2023). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2024). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey; California Department of Education. (2025). Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

Implications and Conclusion

Findings from 3 years of universal prekindergarten (UPK) implementation data reveal both continued progress and a set of persistent and newly emerging challenges as California approaches full transitional kindergarten (TK) expansion. Similar to prior years, local education agencies (LEAs) statewide continue to make progress in implementation: LEAs are offering TK at more elementary school sites; expanding the number of TK classrooms overall; modestly increasing access to full-day options; and continuing to provide UPK options beyond TK such as California State Preschool Program (CSPP), Head Start, and other locally funded early learning programs. At the same time, LEAs appear to be increasingly adopting developmentally appropriate approaches to UPK implementation. A higher percentage of LEAs report offering professional development for TK lead and assistant teachers as well as for school leaders, particularly focused on developmentally appropriate practices and serving children with disabilities—areas aligned with key challenges that have surfaced during expansion. An increasing number of LEAs also report implementing strategies such as play-based learning; developmentally appropriate classroom environments; and open-ended, self-directed learning opportunities. Finally, TK lead and assistant teacher vacancy rates have remained relatively steady across the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years, even as staffing needs increased.

Despite this progress, LEAs continue to face many of the same implementation challenges identified in prior years, including facility constraints, difficulties recruiting and retaining sufficient staff, establishing developmentally appropriate learning environments, meeting students’ developmental and behavioral needs, and securing sufficient and sustainable funding to support these efforts. As TK reaches full rollout, additional challenges have also emerged. These challenges include enrollment challenges—ranging from low or inconsistent enrollment to demand that exceeds available capacity—and emerging impacts of TK expansion on other preschool programs operated by both LEAs and community providers.

As California reaches full TK expansion and continues to invest in UPK, the state has opportunities to further support high-quality, accessible implementation, including:

- providing additional funding to support the modification or expansion of developmentally appropriate facilities;
- investing in pipelines for TK lead and assistant teachers, particularly as one-time UPK funds (such as the Early Education Teacher Development Grant) end and new staffing requirements go into effect;
- supporting and expanding pathways to a PK–3 ECE Specialist Instruction credential to strengthen TK lead teachers’ preparation in developmentally appropriate practice;
- strengthening and sustaining professional development opportunities for TK lead teachers, assistant teachers, and school leaders;
- stabilizing publicly funded preschool and child care programs to alleviate staffing and enrollment shifts throughout UPK implementation, through strategies such as updating reimbursement rates;
- offering technical assistance on the design and selection of curriculum and assessments, including guidance on alignment across and within grade levels; and
- expanding resources and supports for inclusive classrooms, behavioral supports, and student support services.

Furthermore, as California continues to advance its historic investment in UPK, a deeper understanding of implementation and impact across the state’s diverse, mixed delivery system is critical. While this report provides insights into LEA-based programs, several areas warrant further examination to inform policy and practice.

Questions of equity and access remain central to understanding whether California’s UPK system is reaching all children and families. Key questions for future research include:

- What instructional approaches, assessment strategies, and supports are being used to support California’s large population of multilingual learners?
- How are young children with disabilities being served within California’s UPK system? What can we learn about inclusion, access, and the quality of supports provided to students with disabilities, and what preparation and supports do teachers need to best serve young children with disabilities?
- How are families navigating UPK options, making enrollment decisions, and experiencing program quality? What barriers or supports affect equitable access to high-quality programs, and how can policies better address family needs?
- How many TK students have access to expanded learning opportunities?

Additionally, understanding the quality and consistency of UPK implementation across California’s mixed delivery system is equally critical. In addition to examining TK’s long-term impacts on student outcomes, future research should examine:

- How developmentally appropriate is TK instruction? Are students experiencing an early learning program, or is TK effectively becoming a new kindergarten?
- What are TK’s impacts on long-term student outcomes?
- To what extent do expanded learning programs meet developmentally appropriate standards and practices for preschool-age children?
- What professional development opportunities are available to educators across the mixed delivery system—including CSPP, Head Start, and expanded learning programs—and how are these opportunities supporting equitable UPK implementation?
- How is TK expansion influencing enrollment, staffing, and program quality across the mixed delivery system, including non-LEA providers such as community-based centers; family child care homes; and family, friend, and neighbor care? What opportunities exist to strengthen coordination and support a more coherent UPK system across all provider types?

Collectively, these questions illuminate critical gaps in our understanding of California’s implementation of UPK and highlight the need for continued research in this space.

Overall, California’s UPK expansion, and TK in particular, reflects significant momentum and commitment to early learning. As implementation continues to mature, ongoing investment, targeted technical assistance, and thoughtful data collection will be essential to sustaining progress and ensuring that all young learners across the state have access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate early learning opportunities.

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About the Author

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