



# Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Michele Cantwell-Copher, Superintendent

## Early Care & Education Overview

### The Vision

The instrumental role that early care and education (ECE) plays in a child's development is widely known and can be quantified through data. The benefits of providing ECE to all families is astronomical, resulting in the permanent increases in children's IQ's, improved cognitive and social development, a narrowing of the achievement gap between children of different races, lower health care expenditures, crime reduction and thus, lower costs for the criminal justice system. Universal Transitional Kindergarten is a great start, but when the research shows educating children 0-3 is equally if not more important, investing in ECE is crucial.

### The Challenge

Access to high-quality ECE programming in Fresno County is limited. Fresno County has experienced a significant decline in the number of programs since 2003. The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified this decline; since February 2020, 91 childcare facilities in Fresno County closed their doors, exacerbating an already strained system. Today, a mere 23% of Fresno County children aged 0-12 years in working families have access to childcare programs, leaving 77% of children unserved. Only 15% of infants/toddlers have access to ECE programming. For families that make a little more than the state subsidy threshold for assistance, the cost of ECE/childcare is often too expensive with an average annual cost of \$12,000 for infants and more than \$8,000 for preschool-aged children. At the same time, those who care for young children remain among the lowest paid workers in the state.

### The Solution

To increase access to high-quality ECE, the Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Early Care & Education department recommends the following policy changes:

- Increasing funding for ECE, tying funding to program quality and prioritizing care for infants/toddlers and children with the greatest identifiable needs
- Increase affordability of high-quality ECE programs
- Demanding that early education programs that receive public funds participate in ongoing processes that includes benchmarked quality ratings, action plans for improvement, accountability measures, financial incentives, and implement parent education efforts
- Generating ample high-quality care and comprehensive learning programs for infants and toddlers, this includes creating full-day preschool for all low-income children of preschool



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age and establishing guidelines for the easy transitions from early care to preschool, to the K-12 environment

- Improving the state's professional development infrastructure to create and maintain an effective early childhood education workforce, which includes accessibility to coordinated and standardized, high-quality training for educators and caregivers that is research-based and focused on applying knowledge to practice
- Elevate the ECE profession by increasing compensation and reimbursement for ECE workforce

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