Strategic Plan 2018-2023

California Department of Education
Early Learning and Care Division

Photo by: Orange County Department of Education

VISION

All California's children have a strong early learning and care foundation, supporting the whole child and school and lifelong success.

MISSION

Lead an innovative, inclusive, and high-performing early learning and care system by advancing equitable opportunities that optimize thriving children, families, and communities.

PRINCIPLES

We believe:

- All children should have the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Families are children's first and most important teachers, and their culture and home language are assets to be honored.
- The earliest years of a child's life are the most critical and investment in these years generates the most significant return on investment for communities, schools, our state, and the nation. Children's potential is maximized through high-quality early learning and care (ELC) programs that include skilled, educated, culturally and linguistically responsive early educators and providers who are appropriately compensated.
- Strategic public and private partnerships, authentic stakeholder engagement, and rich cross-system relationships with transitional kindergarten (TK) through 12 education and other systems are essential to proactively leverage resources, maximize expertise, and ensure continuous improvement of our interdependent ELC system and outcomes for the whole child.
- The variety of children's and families' needs are best served through a continuum of care settings across a mixed delivery system.
- Strategic capacity building drives positive system reform and alleviates inequities.
- Robust data and strong research are critical to informed decisions about the ELC system, its services and practices, and related policies and funding.
- A dynamic Early Learning and Care Division (ELCD) team of high-performing professionals who embrace continuous improvement and ongoing professional learning is essential to provide responsive service to the early childhood field.

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HOW WE WORK

Throughout all of our work, we will:

- **Ensure** children and families, especially those with high needs, drive every decision we make.
- **Advance Equity** to help every child and family reach their full potential by shifting and realigning systems, policies, and investments to address disparities.
- **Engage Community Members** to hear family and local voices and improve programs and services to reflect their diverse needs.
- **Collaborate in Partnerships** within the California Department of Education, across other state and federal departments, and with the Legislature, administration, stakeholders, and families.
- **Be Data Driven** through the use of data dashboards, maps to align services and needs, and other tools to help inform decision making.
- **Employ Inquiry** methods for creative problem solving to infuse continuous learning and improvement throughout all we do.
- **Lead Innovation** by creating an increasingly responsive, technologically advanced, user-friendly, and streamlined ELC system.
- **Demonstrate Responsible Stewardship** by maximizing public funding through fiscally and programmatically accountable programs that are efficient, responsive, and include effectiveness factors linked to improved child outcomes and increased equity.

Priority 1: One System

Create One System with a Collective Voice and Lead Systems Alignment and Reform

In partnership with diverse stakeholders, families, and other agencies, the Early Learning and Care Division will co-create the vision for California's early learning and care system, strengthen services statewide, and connect with other partners in California through systems and standards alignment, advocacy and policy influence, and legislative action.

Priority 2: Equity, Capacity and Quality

Address Equity by Building Capacity and Quality Across Agencies, Programs, Settings, Communities, and the Early Learning and Care Workforce

The Early Learning and Care Division (ELCD) will expand access to exemplary, inclusive, culturally, and linguistically responsive early learning and care programs designed to meet families' unique needs and support improved child well-being. To improve quality and program effectiveness, the ELCD will expand access to impactful professional learning opportunities to improve the knowledge and skills of the diverse early learning and care workforce.

Priority 3: Excellent Service

Integrity, Stewardship, and Excellence – Provide Reliable Leadership, Service, and Support

The Early Learning and Care Division (ELCD) will implement collaborative, transparent, and results-oriented systems, utilizing technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness. The ELCD will provide effective services and supports by fostering a positive work environment that embraces ongoing learning, collaboration, and respect.

Priority 1:

One System

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Goal 1: Promote Child Well-Being by Strengthening the Early Learning and Care System

1. Lead development and implementation of the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan to maximize strategic and innovative investments and increase alignment, and implement innovative investments, in partnership with other agencies and stakeholders
2. Create a more cohesive early learning and care system utilizing lessons learned from diverse efforts including the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, to connect with other systems, raise quality, streamline and simplify monitoring, and deliver comprehensive services, such as early intervention, health, mental health and family support
3. Monitor, analyze, and pursue federal and other grant opportunities on a regular basis

Goal 2: Improve Quality through Consistent Standards and Monitoring across Programs

1. Revise and align regulatory and monitoring requirements across funding streams to allow greater flexibility and decrease administrative burdens
2. Streamline monitoring so programs funded by multiple funding streams have an efficient, reliable, and responsive monitoring process; facilitate reciprocity in monitoring across state and federal funding streams
3. Create broad capacity and provide training and technical assistance for agencies and programs to successfully transition to aligned standards
4. Maximize publicly funded programs' participation in Quality Counts California (QCC) to ensure more programs are engaged in continuous quality improvement efforts and have equitable access to responsive, effective quality improvement supports

Goal 3: Increase Impact through a Shared Vision for California's Early Learning and Care System and for the Whole Child

1. Implement strategic public and private partnerships and develop rich relationships with the Legislature, the administration, and TK—12 education leaders to proactively leverage state and local resources and promote optimal gains for children and families
2. Work with state and local agencies and advocates to implement a unified set of policy priorities that support child and family well-being
3. Use aligned messages to educate key stakeholders about the importance of high-quality ELC settings, responsive relationships, and the importance of the early years on brain development and children's long-term well-being and success
4. Connect ELC to long-term school and life outcomes, as measured by the California School Dashboard, the achievement gap, and other methods

Photo by: San Diego County Office of Education

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Goal 1: Increase Opportunities for Children and Families through Equitable Access to Programs and Services that Reduce Disparities

1. Design, resource, and implement programs and policies to deliver equitable outcomes for all children, including children with exceptional needs
2. Make strategic investments that strengthen core elements of the ELC infrastructure to increase accessibility, improve ease of use, and expand impact
3. Ensure ELCD's policies, regulations, and quality investments are accessible and equitable through robust stakeholder engagement and feedback loops
4. Partner with diverse agencies and leaders whose perspective and input has not always been included and work closely with other systems of support (e.g., Tribal child care, home visiting) to build access and capacity in areas of the state with a high level of unmet needs

Goal 2: Improve Early Learning and Care across the Diverse Continuum of Mixed Delivery Settings by Supporting Continuous Quality Improvement

1. Create an aligned system of continuous quality improvement under the QCC umbrella that connects and coordinates all the CCDF quality investments and other quality efforts, resulting in an effective, efficient, and responsive system of supports
2. Provide families with user-friendly consumer education and information to select ELC settings that best meet their needs and support their children's development
3. Expand QCC to reach more settings and programs supporting children and families with high needs and elevate overall program quality, adult-child interactions, family strengthening, and the skills and education of the workforce
4. Create focused opportunities for local partners to test and prove innovative strategies to improve quality, increase efficiency and responsiveness, and better serve ELC programs and families

Goal 3: Support Young Children's Learning and Development through a Well-Prepared Early Childhood Workforce Across all Settings

1. Create a cohesive ELC professional learning system by establishing a unifying framework for career pathways, knowledge, competencies, qualifications, and standards that is designed and implemented in partnership with diverse stakeholders, including higher education and community-based organizations
2. Advance a strong and diverse ELC profession with greater advancement and equity along the Career Lattice as well as the QCC quality rating and improvement system
3. Invest in high-impact professional learning experiences that develop the knowledge and skills of early learning professionals to provide high-quality and culturally and linguistically responsive learning experiences
4. Strengthen site leadership to promote strong program implementation, effective business operations, inclusionary practices and environments, multilingualism, responsive family strengthening, and engagement in continuous improvement and inquiry

Photo by:San Diego County Office of Education

Priority 3:

Excellent Service

Integrity, Stewardship, and Excellence – Provide Reliable Leadership, Service, and Support

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Goal 1: Ensure Program Integrity and Responsiveness to Children, Families, and Communities through Highly Accountable Public Investments

1. Provide more supportive services to the ELCD contractors and reduce administrative burden through reliable, responsive, and valuable information; improve processes for contractor reviews and follow-ups; and implement strategies, such as multi-year, competitive contracts
2. Use data to inform program improvement and refine processes, tools, reports, and training and technical assistance
3. Develop systems for risk-based monitoring and targeted technical assistance and training to provide more support to agencies and programs that would benefit from additional resources

Goal 2: Improve Service Quality through Technology and Improved Business Operations

1. With state partners, procure and implement a unified data system that is user-friendly for programs, funders, and partners and provides robust data on monitoring, program quality, and impact of investments on program quality and children's outcomes
2. Increase internal efficiencies through systems for tracking tasks and documents, expansion of database capacity to interface effectively with clients and customers, and creation of efficient administrative processes
3. Update externally focused business processes related to funding opportunities, including multi-year re-competition, case conferences, field monitoring, contracting, and relinquishment of contracts

Goal 3: Promote Highly Engaged Staff to Lead Innovation

1. Strengthen the ELCD culture and increase the engagement, commitment, and capacity to learn at every level of the organization
2. Implement a system of annual goals and regular benchmarks by division, unit, and individual
3. Actively cultivate skills of the ELCD team and support career advancement
4. Consistently engage staff, rigorously assess progress, refresh goals and benchmarks, and implement a culture of continuous improvement and shared responsibility

Photo by: YMCA East Bay