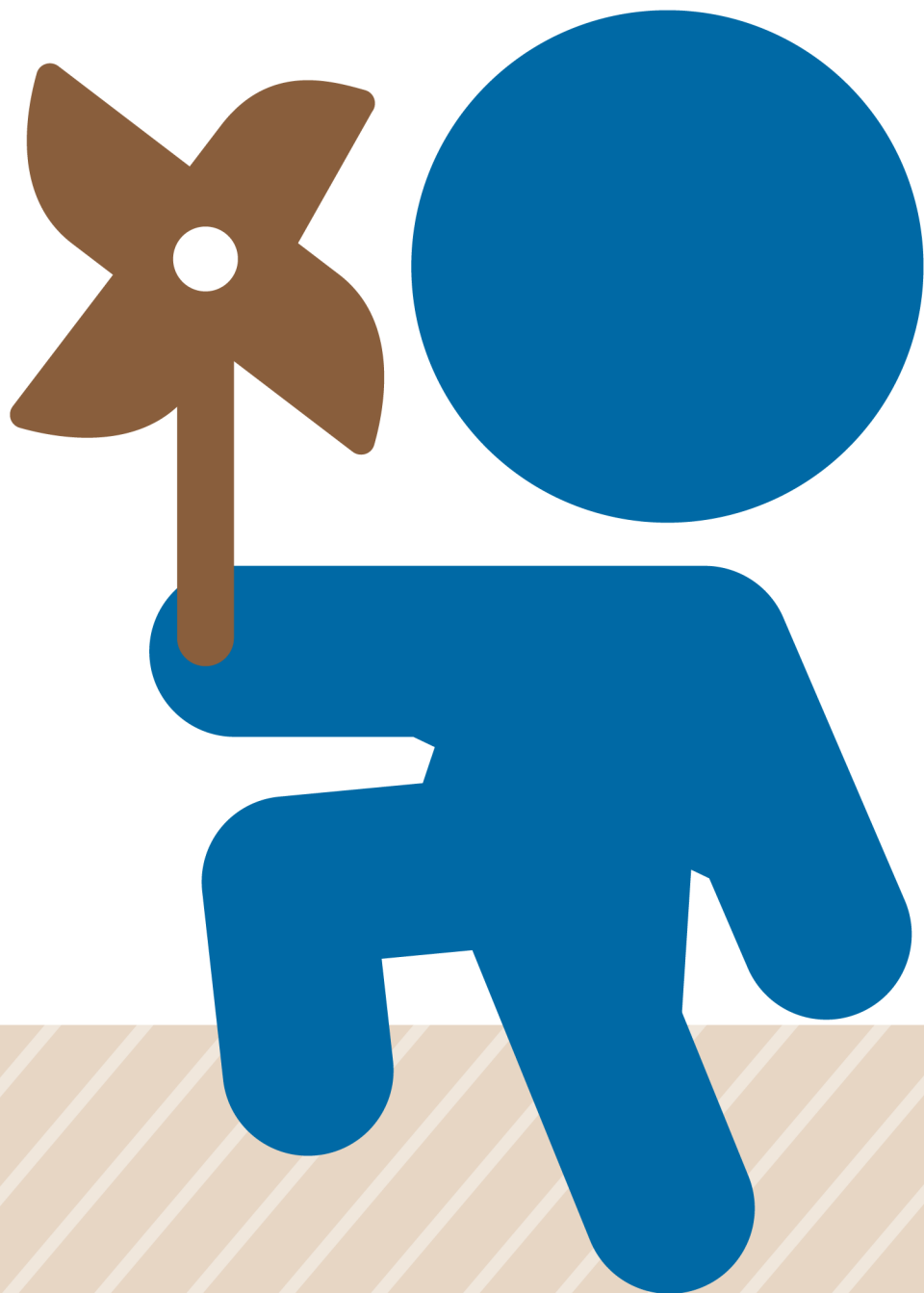


Early Care and Education Advocacy Toolkit





The Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) Strong Start and Steps to Success initiatives, in partnership with the SCCOE's Department of Government Relations, developed the following toolkit to provide information about best practices for early care and education advocates.

Individuals interested in participating in a yearly training for advocates can contact Dr. Matt Tinsley, Director of Strong Start Santa Clara County, at mtinsley@sccoe.org to learn more.



Santa Clara County  Office of Education

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A MESSAGE FROM THE SANTA CLARA COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS



Providing equitable access to high-quality early learning programs is central to advancing opportunities for all of Santa Clara County's youngest learners. Years of research on the impacts of enrollment and regular attendance in high-quality childcare, preschool, transitional kindergarten, and kindergarten programs points to positive short- and long-term outcomes for children's success in life and future careers. As early learning advocates, we have the capacity to increase public understanding of the importance, economic impact, and community benefits of high-quality early learning programs.

With advocacy as central to promoting access to high quality learning programs, Strong Start of Santa Clara County is pleased to present the Early Care and Education Advocacy Toolkit. The toolkit includes information about best practices, research on the value of early learning programs, Santa Clara County data sources, and sample talking points. This toolkit is meant to support advocates as they promote local, state, and national early care and education initiatives that increase access to high quality early education and encourage increased investments in early care and education.

It is our sincere belief that the collective effort to advocate on behalf of families will increase early learning opportunities throughout the county. This effort will ensure that every child begins their steps towards success in life with a strong foundation embedded in early learning.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Ann Dewan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Ann Dewan, Ph. D.
County Superintendent of Schools





WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is an ongoing process of advancing a policy agenda through intentionally building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with people empowered to make change. Good advocates know the issue, proposed solutions, and how policy makers can help them implement the preferred change. Advocates understand what motivates and constrains audiences, and that the process of change making takes persistence and patience.

TEN GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

1

Define the ask

- This is the single most important part of advocacy: What is the specific change being requested? What should policy makers do to address the identified problem?
- If policy makers don't know what the ask is, they can't provide it. Complaining isn't advocacy.
- Make your ask in the first 2 to 3 minutes. Repeat it. Often.
- When writing, the ask should be in the first sentence and the last paragraph (at minimum).

2

Know what policy makers can and can't do

- Make sure the person you are talking to has the power to do what you are asking.
 - Elected: use platform, author/sponsor legislation, support or oppose legislation, apply pressure to support/oppose a bill in committee hearing, submit a budget ask or identify something as a budget priority.
 - Staff: set tone, express support or opposition for an idea or legislation, highlight an issue platform, issue or pull back regulations, ratchet up or down enforcement, help with implementation issues.
- Part of your role as an advocate is to research who are the right people for you to be advocating with. It is not reasonable to expect a policy maker to make a referral to the right person/entity.

3

Know the audience

- Messages should be tailored to the audience by emphasizing the points that are most likely to resonate with them.
- What are their interests? Past bills/policies?
- What are issues of most concern to their supporters?
- New v. veteran policy maker.
- Are there existing connections between the issue and the policy maker (e.g., geography)?

4

Use talking points

- Create talking points and try not to stray too far from them.
- These keep everyone on message and consistent. When policy makers hear dissent between partners/advocates, they tend to dismiss the issue and/or solution.
- Don't read talking points. Use goal posts to remember them.
- Be primarily persuasive, but also informational.
- The best talking points describe:
 - What the problem is and why a solution is needed.
 - The ask.
 - Why this solution is best versus something else (hint: research).

5

Create impactful materials and infographics

- Create a colorful, impactful flyer and then leave them with the policy maker. This will help them remember the issue and the ask.
- Use as few words as possible.
- Use graphs to communicate data.
- Use pictures to accompany the most salient points/arguments.
- Prepare only one page for a fact sheet.
- Prepare no more than two pages for an infographic.

6

Level setting and assumptions

- Before launching into a monologue, ask how much the policy maker knows about the topic. Tailor the message accordingly.
- Understand that other people know and care about the issue, even if they don't have the same solution and ask.

7

The rule of 3s

- Focus on just three main points/arguments. This strict constraint will force a focus on what's important and makes it easier for the audience to remember your points.
- Repeat the arguments at least three times. Psychological studies have shown that repeating something three times helps people remember.

8

Never, ever get heated

- Advocacy is not about fighting. It's about making the strongest, best researched, and most clearly articulated argument.
- It's fine to be emotional, just not aggressive.
- Creating a negative interaction detracts from your argument and probably reduces your future opportunities for advocacy.

“Every child deserves a champion—an adult that will never give up on them.” – Rita F. Pierson



9

Not every question has an immediate answer

- Even the most experienced advocates won't have all the answers. Be prepared, but comfortable with saying when more time or study is required to answer a specific question.
- It's better to have the right answer than the answer in the moment.
- Sometimes answering a question requires checking with supporters/allies.
- Then actually follow through by circling back with the answer. This is another opportunity to strengthen a relationship with the policy maker.

10

Thank you and feedback loop

- Be the one person they talk to that day that says "thank you" - especially when speaking to staff. Staff listen to complaints 90% of the time and hardly ever hear solutions or compliments.
- When a policy maker supports the ask and the change passes/is implemented, remember to circle back and tell them how things are going. How have their efforts addressed the need and helped people?

RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING TALKING POINTS

The Framework Institute is a valuable resource that “applies social science methods to study how people understand social issues—and how best to frame them.” The institute has resources to help frame conversations about early learning. Topics include child and adolescent development, education equity, families, health, and much more. The Framework Institute’s toolkit “Talking about Early Childhood Development” (<https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkit/talking-about-early-childhood-development/>) includes message briefs, case studies and responses to questions from your audience.

The following grid provides information about local government areas of responsibility:

CITY	COUNTY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Police ▪ Fire department ▪ Libraries and parks ▪ Water, sewage, and garbage ▪ Some housing ▪ Some roads, infrastructure and public transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sheriff ▪ Education (property tax) ▪ District attorney and public defender’s offices ▪ County health departments, including behavioral health (operation) ▪ County social services (operating) ▪ County hospitals and clinics ▪ Some roads and infrastructure ▪ Services for unincorporated areas
State	Federal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health and mental health ▪ Education ▪ Courts ▪ Corrections and rehabilitation (AG, state prisons) ▪ Social services, food and welfare ▪ Some roads and infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health ▪ Social security and unemployment insurance ▪ Defense and war ▪ 3% or less on each of the following: food and welfare programs, agriculture subsidies, education, energy and the environment, housing programs, transportation/roads, science (e.g. NASA), and international affairs (13% total)



ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

Below are some additional suggestions to enhance advocacy and strengthen relationships with policy makers.

Include local stories

- The farther away policy makers are from the community they represent, the less they hear about what is actually happening on the ground.
- Policy makers almost always hear generic stories and numbers. Provide them specific information/stories about the community they represent.
- Policy makers talk to lobbyists all day. Bring them a real person who does the job or receives the service. They won't remember the lobbyist, but they will remember the person they spoke to "in the field."

Being human

- Don't shy away from telling brief, personal, compelling stories, and try to do so in 3 minutes or less.
- The stories can be positive or negative.
- While data is compelling, data coupled with emotion is the "secret sauce" of advocacy.

Identify ambassadors and allies

- Maximize your influence by identifying others who share your interests and are willing to help disseminate your ask.
- Look to established groups with similar goals/purpose.
- Identify silent influencers with greater access.
- The first question that every lobbyist asks is: “Who is in support? Who is in opposition?”
- A long list of supporters will make a group think twice about opposing your idea.

Mitigate opposition

- Anticipate and be prepared to rebut your opposition.
- Work with friends to play devil’s advocate. What are the most compelling arguments they will raise?
- Have there been similar bills? If so, who opposed?
- If there are good opposition arguments, don’t ignore them. Identify and respond to them.

Meet with staff

- Elected officials have staff who they rely on and listen to. In many cases, they have staff tasked with understanding a particular issue. They may also have district staff focused on constituent services. In most cases, staff are more accessible than the elected official and advocating with staff can be a great way to ensure that your message is heard by them.
- The laws and policies will be implemented by agency staff. They are the experts.
- They will show you pitfalls and past failures. They may even help you find an author or argue your case to policy makers (whose vote you need) or agency leadership (whose support you need).
- If they are going to implement a change, they are going to weigh in anyway. Give them a chance to shape the idea and give your idea a better chance of succeeding because of staff support.
- If your argument or suggested change needs to be refined, they may even help improve it.

Engage early and often

- Don’t wait until the issue shows up on a meeting agenda, especially if there are concerns. Know the calendar of meetings, budget sessions, and subcommittees and advocate before decisions are made.
- Remember, advocacy is about building and maintaining a relationship, rather than making a series of asks.

ADVOCACY FORUMS

Advocacy doesn't always happen in a one-on-one meeting with an elected official. There are lots of different ways to be heard. Different venues may require different tools and techniques but the basics of advocacy – the points and the ask – should always be the same.

Written

- Letters of support or opposition
- Infographics and one pagers
- Fact sheets
- Research briefs and reports
- Social media
- Traditional media

In-person

- Hearings (specific bills and informational)
- Meetings with electeds, electeds' staff
- Meetings with the agency staff
- Phone call to the elected representative
- Rallies and protests

Ambassadors

- Identify trusted partners who share the goals
- Identify the partners who have the ear of the right people and more access than you do
- E.g., elected officials, respected silent influencers, organizations with power, grassroots

RESEARCH ON THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF EARLY LEARNING

Years of research demonstrate that children’s early experiences impact long-term outcomes in life. Attending early learning programs allows a child to develop academic, emotional, physical, and social skills that are necessary for successful transitions into the K-12 system. In addition, “enrollment in early care and education programs can also lend consistency and stability to children’s lives, advancing their social competence, behavioral and cognitive outcomes, language development, school adjustment, and overall child well-being” (North Carolina Pathways to Grade Level Reading, 2017a). When children regularly attend early learning programs, the rewards are felt within families, districts, communities, and most importantly, the individual child.



Impact on academics and school readiness

When children attend early learning programs, they have a much better chance of entering the K-12 system fully ready for kindergarten. Children who enter the K-12 system ready for school have an 82% chance of mastering “basic skills by age 11, compared with a 45% chance for children who are not school ready” (Pritzker, Bradach, & Kaufmann, 2015). Entering kindergarten without sufficient foundational skills is a predictor of academic challenges in the primary years that can follow the child into high school (North Carolina Pathways to Grade Level Reading, 2017a). Ensuring that children enter kindergarten with key foundational skills for school readiness is imperative for the development of every child.

One of the greatest positive impacts of entering school with sufficient readiness skills is the ability to master grade-level literacy goals. When children enter school with readiness skills, their likelihood of reading proficiently by the end of third grade increases. Consequently, “children who are not reading proficiently at the end of the third grade are four times more likely not to graduate, and for children of color the rate of high school non-completion doubles” (North Carolina Pathways to Grade Level Reading, 2017a). Given that 90% of a child’s brain development occurs by age five, and in light of the statistical possibilities of experiencing challenging circumstances in later life, participation in quality early learning programming becomes an essential part of a child’s education (Bakken, Brown, & Downing, 2017).

Impact on social emotional learning, self-regulation, and self-care

Research has demonstrated that “the emotional, social, and behavioral competence of young children is a strong predictor of academic performance in elementary school and beyond, even affecting

employment and income in adulthood” (NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading, 2017b). While families may commonly believe that school readiness entails the knowledge of basic academic skills, the reality is that academics only accounts for ¼ of the major necessary building blocks for school readiness. In order for children to be fully ready for kindergarten they must demonstrate skills in the areas of social expression, self-regulation, motor skill development, and academics. A child who has a challenging time following directions, playing cooperatively, handling emotions, and expressing needs and wants, will likely have a more challenging time navigating collective spaces with peers and in instruction.

Attendance in early programs provides children the opportunity to develop these skills in small settings and with assistance from caring adults. Through early learning, children build the capacity to understand how to interact positively with peers and adults, how to take ownership of their learning with assistance, and how to navigate the tools and routines commonly found in school settings.

Early learning and special education

Schools are a primary partner in connecting families to essential networks of support. This is especially true for families who have children with disabilities. “About 15 percent of American children ages 3 to 17 years of age have a developmental or behavioral disability. Many children with developmental disabilities are not identified before they reach fourth grade” (NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading, 2017c). Early



learning is a vehicle through which children’s needs can be identified and met much earlier in life. The family-school connection provides families with a network of services and supports for the benefit of the whole child.

When needs are met early, it has a preventative effect. “Much of the past research indicates that there is lower placement in special education for children who attend quality preschool programs, especially as children reached older ages in school” (Bakken, Brown, & Downing, 2017).

Early learning and health

Similarly to the expansion of networks that occurs for families who have children with disabilities, participation in early learning is also a key vehicle through which families become connected to health networks. The first eight years of life serve as the foundation for building healthy habits. “Regular health care can help prevent chronic, undiagnosed health issues, and manage chronic conditions, such as childhood diabetes and asthma, which are obstacles to learning ... Healthy children are more likely to be

physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally ready for kindergarten, attend school consistently, and benefit from high-quality learning environments” (NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading, 2017d).

Impact of early learning on communities

Early learning programs do not only drive positive change for children and families, they also make an impact on district resource distribution. The impact of readiness, or lack thereof, has direct correlation to the interventions, personnel, and additional resources utilized in kindergarten through third grade classrooms across districts. When 50% of the achievement gap in third grade classrooms already exists at kindergarten enrollment (Rathburn, West, & Germino Hausken, 2004), promoting early learning programs becomes a critical step towards allowing for more flexible resource distribution to other areas of need within school systems.

The benefits of early childhood programming also create a positive financial impact within the community. Leading economists state that for every dollar we invest in early childhood education, the community receives “a \$7 return on investment through a reduced need for spending later in life” (Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2014). James Heckman, Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, has long voiced the power of investment in the early years. He boldly states:



“The logic is quite clear from an economic standpoint. We can invest early to close disparities and prevent achievement gaps, or we can pay to remediate disparities when they are harder and more expensive to close. Either way we are going to pay. And, we’ll have to do both for a while. But there is an important difference between the two approaches. Investing early allows us to shape the future; investing later chains us to fixing the missed opportunities of the past” (Heckman, 2011).

Recent research also indicates that the positive effects of attending early learning are felt across generations. In a landmark longitudinal study started in 1962, the Perry Preschool Project is one of the most well-known early childhood education studies that sought to identify the impact of early childhood programs on children with high risk factors. The research in this study revealed the possible “intergenerational effects of early childhood education on achievement, economic gains, and upward mobility” (The Heckman Equation, 2020). The positive effects of early learning thus have the potential to be felt within communities long after children have left early learning classrooms.

Early learning and equity

High quality early learning programs can serve as a vehicle through which we increase opportunities and access to ensure that all students are successful. In Silicon Valley, 26% of low-income three-year-olds are enrolled in preschool programs compared to 52% for higher-income children of the same age group (Hanson, Adams, & Koball, 2016). In Silicon Valley, 61% of low-income four-year-olds are enrolled in preschool while 74% of higher-income four-year-olds participate in early learning programming (Hanson, Adams, & Koball, 2016). Research has demonstrated that when children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds attend early learning programs, they are more likely to have higher rates of education, health, and incomes when compared to children from similar circumstances who do not attend these programs (Pritzker, Bradach, & Kaufmann, 2015).

Suspension and removal rates in early learning

The relationships built in early life between child and educator set the stage for how children may come to perceive the school setting in relation to their identity. Caring, inclusive, and equitable spaces are a few of the essential characteristics found in high-quality learning environments. At the core of these essential characteristics are student-to-educator relationships. These relationships are developed through many interactions, including ways in which discipline is managed. Through the use of non-exclusionary, positive disciplinary strategies, strong relationships are cultivated and ensure educators, families and their children are supported, thus increasing opportunities for consistent attendance. Nationally, however, statistics reveal that we have much work ahead of us when it comes to discipline in early learning settings.

While California, as in most states across the country, does not have publicly available data on exclusionary discipline for young learners, national research highlighting suspension, expulsion and removal rates shows an urgency to address the issue. A Yale University study conducted in 2016 revealed that preschool expulsion rates were more than three times that of expulsions for school-aged children (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). In a 2016 study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the responses from a nationwide parent survey revealed that nearly 50,000 early learners were suspended in a year with 17,000 expulsions occurring during the same year (Meek, et al., 2020).

Research demonstrates that expelling and suspending young children makes little impact on student behavior. “There is an abundance of evidence that indicates that harsh discipline results in a host of negative outcomes [such as] school disengagement, grade retention, and school dropout” (Meek, Blevins, Catherine, & Alexander, 2020). These negative outcomes, in turn, contribute to the preschool-to-prison pipeline (Malik, 2017).

Early learners who are students of color or who have a disability tend to have much higher rates of exclusion for similar behaviors to those of their White peers. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights found that “Black boys represent 19% of public preschool enrollment, but 45% of male preschool suspensions, and Black girls represent 20% of preschool enrollment, but 54% of female preschool suspensions” (Meek, et al., 2020). Children who are boys, African-American, or bigger than their peers tend to receive suspension and expulsion at much higher rates than other children (Meek, et al., 2020).

Implicit bias is one of many factors that may contribute to inequities in discipline for early learners. In a Yale study conducted by Dr. Gilliam and colleagues in 2016, findings revealed that early educators monitor African-American children, particularly boys, longer than other children. Tracking student movement varied dependent upon the teacher's own race. If the teacher had knowledge of the child's background and was of the same race as the child, severity of discipline decreased. Severity of discipline increased when the teacher was not of the same race and knew the child's background (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016).



SANTA CLARA COUNTY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION DATA RESOURCES

Coming prepared with data to highlight talking points is key. The following resources provide information about the state of early care and education in Santa Clara County.

2022 Santa Clara County Children’s Data Book

The data book, prepared by Kids In Common, features key indicators of child and youth well-being and an update on progress toward achieving the vision of Santa Clara County’s Bill of Rights for Children and Youth. <https://www.kidsincommon.org/resources>

California Child Care Resource & Referral Network Child Care Portfolio

This portfolio presents data on childcare supply, demand, and cost statewide and county-by- county, as well as information on employment, poverty, and family budgets. <https://rrnetwork.org/assets/general-files/Santa-Clara-04-20.pdf>

Santa Clara County Kindergarten Parent Survey Fall 2020 Findings

This report describes the findings of a kindergarten parent survey that assessed areas of strength and need among young children and their families, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://www.sccoe.org/Documents/Santa-Clara-School-Readiness-Parent-Survey-Report-2020.pdf>

School Readiness: Findings from the Fall 2018 Assessment in Santa Clara County

This report describes the state of school readiness and related findings for kindergarten students across Santa Clara County. <https://www.sccoe.org/resources/families/Pages/School-Readiness-Assessment.aspx>

Santa Clara and San Benito County Head Start Community Assessment

The Community Assessment provides information on the numbers of eligible children, their location, race, ethnicity and home language, the education, health, nutrition, and social service needs of eligible children and their families, and the strengths of the community and resources that are available to meet these needs. <https://www.sccoe.org/depts/educational-services/early-learning-services/Documents/HSCA%202021.pdf>.

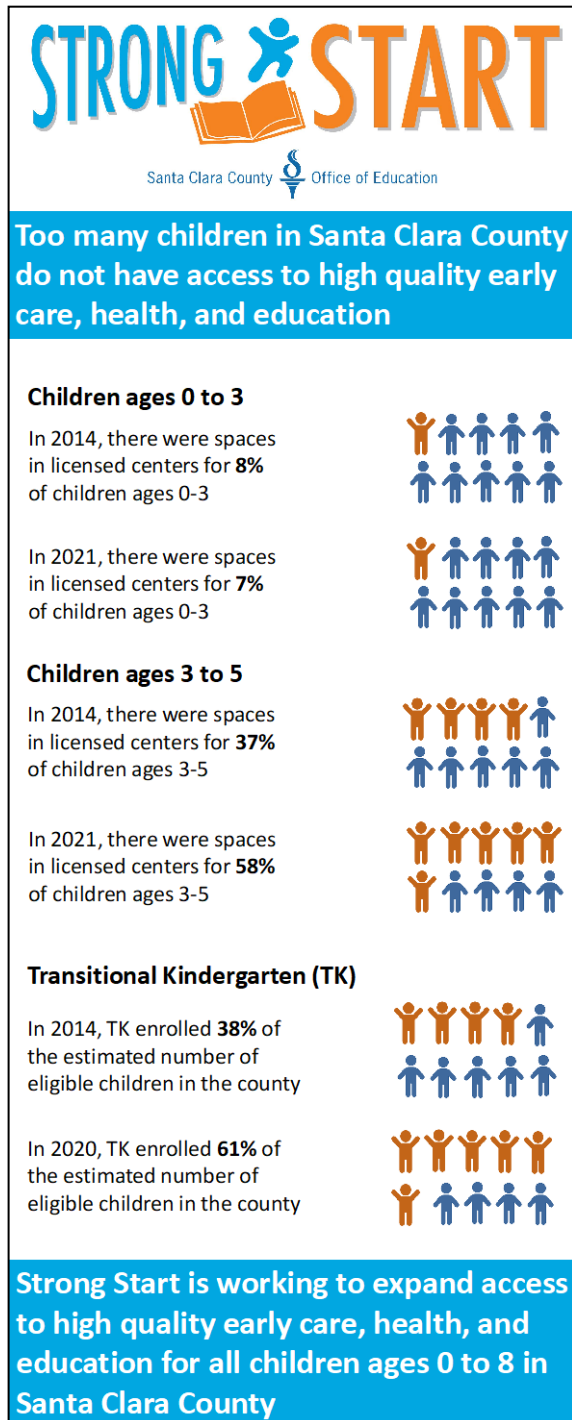
LPC Priority Zip Code Report

The Priority Zip Code Report provides information about local childcare priority areas within Santa Clara County to assist CDE and CDSS in determining where state childcare funds should be allocated. It is not a full representation of childcare supply and demand. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14N9d8ALeejqZNNua87LO-CfzJZFIxqK7?usp=sharing>

Steps to Success

SCCOE’s Steps to Success early learning enrollment site contains a wealth of resources and information on the importance and impact of high-quality early learning and care programs, the need for regular attendance, and what children learn in preschool, transitional kindergarten, and kindergarten. <https://www.sccoe.org/resources/early-learning-enrollment>

EXAMPLES OF FACT SHEETS AND INFOGRAPHICS



SB 692 Special Education Inclusion Act



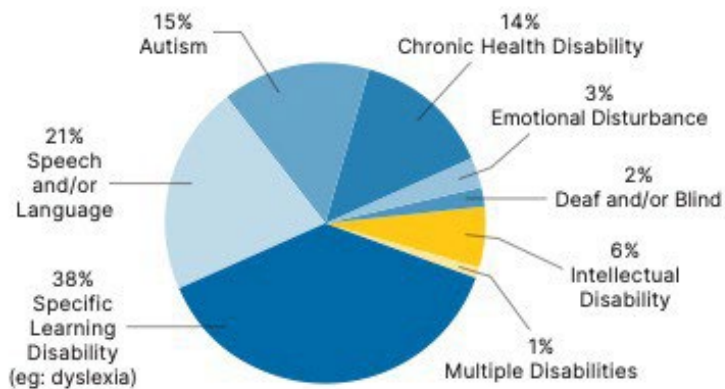
12% of California students have been identified with a disability.

In 2019, students with disabilities scored on average **88 points** and **119 points below standard** on English and math assessments, respectively.

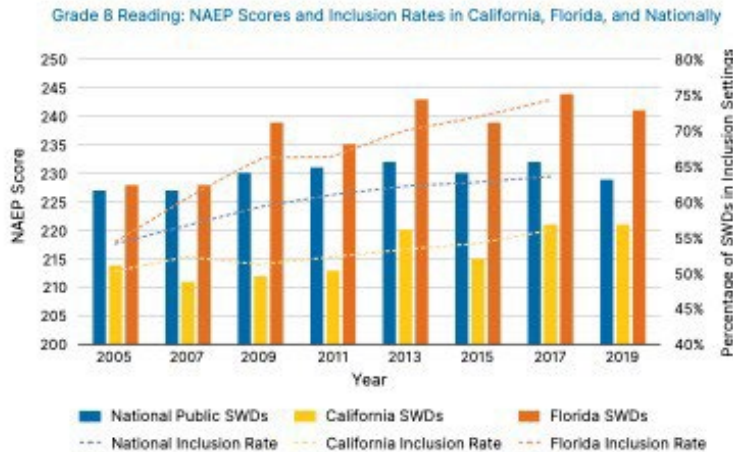


More than 90% of students with a disability can keep pace academically with their peers when appropriately accommodated.

Yet only 53% of California's students with disabilities spend time in a general education classroom.



States that have increased their inclusion (least restrictive environment) rates over the last decade have seen parallel increases in academic achievement for students with disabilities.



SB 692 would:

Incentivize districts to place students with disabilities in the most inclusive environment that is appropriate by adding an existing federal indicator (least restrictive environment) to the state accountability dashboard.



Citations available at <https://bit.ly/sb692citations>

PUBLIC COMMENT TEMPLATES

Public comment template for school districts

**This messaging is approximately two minutes in length and may need to be adjusted to fit your available speaking time.*

Good evening Trustees, Superintendent _____ and staff

My name is _____ and I am [1. Resident of district, if true and/or 2. your position and organizational affiliation if authorized by your organization or 3. concerned about the need for access to quality preschool and childcare in our community – choose the one that you feel is most impactful or you are most comfortable with]

We know that children are born learning and that 90% of a child's brain develops by age 5. Our children need increased access to quality, full day preschool and TK, as well as before school, after school and summer learning programs. These provide expanded learning opportunities for children which is vital for their long-term success. They also provide a safe place for young children so that families do not have to worry about transportation and work. This is especially true for low-income families.

Only 50% of kindergarteners in Santa Clara County have the academic and social-emotional skills to be fully ready upon school entry. Children who are fully school-ready are more likely to be proficient readers by third grade and more likely to graduate from high school. It's important that you have school readiness data broken down by student sub-group so that you can ensure every child has what they need to be successful.

All of these benefits of early learning programs only happen if children are in school consistently. Having data and staffing to identify which children are at risk before they become chronically absent, understanding why families are struggling to get their children to school, and connecting families to community resources to address these issues are necessary to support consistent attendance and ensure that the children who need these programs the most are able to attend. [Your call to action may be modified and tailored to the agenda item and your personal experience/perspective].

Thank you for your time.

Public Comment Template for Cities

**This messaging is approximately two minutes in length and may need to be adjusted to fit your available speaking time.*

Good evening Mayor, Council Members and staff. My name is _____ and I am [1. Resident of city, and/or 2. State your position and organizational affiliation, if authorized by your organization or 3. concerned about the need for access to quality early care and education programs in our community. Choose the one that you feel is most impactful or you are most comfortable with.]

The current COVID pandemic has demonstrated that access to high quality early care and education programs is essential for working families. Workers need a safe place for their young children in order to keep our economy moving. This is especially true for essential workers, caregivers who can't work from home, and low-income families.

County data over the course of the pandemic shows that our city has lost childcare providers, further reducing options for parents and increasing barriers to access childcare, workforce participation, and economic recovery. As we rebuild, it's essential that we consider early learning programs to be part of our community's vital infrastructure.

There are specific actions that cities can take to support access to quality early learning programs. These could include: 1) reducing fees and simplifying business licensing requirements, 2) waiving parking restrictions, 3) including the need for childcare in the city's general plans in the areas of public facilities and services, land use, housing, circulation, open space or economic development, and 4) incentivizing employers to provide childcare as a benefit to their employees. [Your call to action may be modified and tailored to the agenda item and your personal experience/perspective].

If you are interested in the specific impact that the pandemic has had on childcare programs within our city, please contact the Santa Clara County Office of Education's Local Early Education Planning Council.

The decisions you make have direct impact on the lives of children and families.

Thank you for your consideration



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