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To: John Schneur, White House**Fax:** 202 456-7028**From:** DELAINE EASTIN**Date:** 05/13/99**Re:** UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL REPORT **Pages:** 4 (including cover sheet)**CC:**☒ Urgent☐ For Review☐ Please Comment☐ Please Reply☐ Please Recycle

Attached is the Executive Summary from the Universal Preschool Report, *Ready to Learn, Quality Preschools for California in the 21st Century, 1998*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the millennium draws near, it is becoming increasingly clear that during the twentieth century the way of life and approaches to educating children in the United States have changed irrevocably. We now know that a stimulating environment and positive learning experiences during the early years have a powerful effect on young children's later performance in school and behavior as adults. To develop the highly educated workforce needed in the twenty-first century, we must change our way of thinking about early education and provide quality preschool programs to help our children succeed.

While quality programs exist in California, resources to support these programs are limited; and there are often long waiting lists for children to get into these programs. Consequently, far too many California families have few choices, or no choice, in gaining access to high-quality developmental opportunities for their preschool children.

As a recent national study of early childhood education noted, "A growing body of research has established that the majority of America's young children spend their day in settings that are poor to mediocre in quality—settings that compromise children's long-term development" (Kagan and Cohen 1997, 2). The result is often a desperate scramble among parents of young children to find child care that is trustworthy, reliable, and affordable.

Universal Preschool Task Force

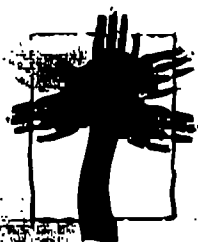
In November 1997, recognizing the critical importance of preschool as a foundation for success both in school and in life, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin convened a task force of distinguished educators, parents, researchers, and civic and business leaders from throughout California to consider how to make preschool programs universally available within the next ten years to all three- and four-year-olds whose families want this option.

Universal preschool is an integral part of Superintendent Eastin's agenda for improved student achievement in California. The concept of universal preschool recognizes that before children enter kindergarten, much of their potential for learning and healthy growth has been shaped—in some cases it has already been diminished. Universal preschool is intimately linked with the movement toward higher standards and expectations for all California students and offers broad opportunities to prepare students for personal and academic success.

This report, *Ready to Learn: Quality Preschools for California in the 21st Century*, presents the findings and recommendations of the Superintendent's Universal Preschool Task Force. It offers details and proposals for a comprehensive program to be phased in over the next ten years. It represents the best thinking of leaders in the field on the premise that now is the time to move ahead with a realistic and feasible plan.

Urgent Education Priority

THE timing of this report is critically important. California is enjoying a period of economic strength and optimism. Nevertheless, the state continues to lag behind most other states in the educational achievement and academic success of its students. In addition, extensive research in recent years has demonstrated the undeniable influence of preschool education on children's later success in school. When children experience success in school, numerous other problems, such as dropping out of school, delinquency, crime, and teenage pregnancy, are prevented. Reliable studies have shown that every \$1 invested in quality preschool programs saves \$7 in expenditures for social and rehabilitative services later on (Berrueta-Clements



Early care and education provides a public good; promotes child health and development, enhancing children's readiness for school and their long-term success; supports many parents who work out of the home; and saves taxpayers countless dollars by preventing many social and psychological ills. As with investments in public education, the public—not simply the immediate consumers—derive benefits. Consequently, the public—not simply the immediate consumers—should be responsible for the funding of American early care and education.

—S. L. Kagan and N. E. Cohen,
*Not by Chance: Creating an Early Care
and Education System for America's Children*

and others 1984). California's educational system is at a crucial juncture, and the need for universal preschool must be considered among the state's most urgent education priorities.

In addition, there is an enormous need for *quality* preschools. According to research on preschool and early childhood programs, high standards of program quality are one of the most important keys to children's future academic success. This report defines quality in all of its dimensions, including results for children, the nature of services provided to children and families, program standards, professional standards, adult-to-child ratios and group size, facilities, accountability, evaluation, and availability of funds. All these factors must be considered as California moves forward in making preschool accessible to all children and families.

Full implementation of universal preschool for all three- and four-year-olds in California will be costly. Providing universal preschool will add two full grade levels of children to the public education system. Although the task force envisions incremental annual additions of funds from a variety of sources, the projected annual cost in today's dollars is an estimated \$5 billion for a half-day school-year program for all preschoolers.

Clearly, this is a major investment. The task force has concluded, however, that an investment in the education of young children comparable to investments for kindergarten through grade twelve and postsecondary education is essential if California is to regain its national role as an educational leader.

This report presents six major recommendations that, taken together, provide guidelines leading to full implementation of universally available preschool within ten years. Each of the recommendations is described in more detail in the following chapters.



Recommendations of the Universal Preschool Task Force

1. Offer publicly funded universal preschool within ten years to all three- and four-year-old children in California for at least one-half day during the regular school year.
2. Develop a master plan for universal preschool that will be completed by January 1, 2001.
3. Take immediate action to phase in universal preschool:
 - Start programs now.
 - Expand the supply of qualified teaching staff and facilities.
 - Establish the support system and invest 10 percent of available funds in the support system and in quality enhancement.
4. Raise the program standards and professional standards of universal preschool providers:
 - Establish high content, performance, and program standards to improve school readiness for all children.
 - Develop an accountability system by monitoring progress with appropriate assessment processes and requiring programs to meet accreditation standards.
 - Establish high professional standards to upgrade the training and certification requirements and increase compensation levels to recruit and retain highly qualified personnel who can meet the needs of children who are culturally and linguistically diverse.
 - Maintain adult-to-child ratios that enhance the quality of services and produce desired results for children.
5. Make universal preschool available in a variety of settings and coordinate programs with other services:
 - Offer school-based, center-based, and home-based options.
 - Establish extensions and connections with year-round providers to offer full-day child care with funds available for that purpose.
 - Coordinate with other providers to make nutrition, health, and social services available for families who need such services, using the funds targeted for those purposes.
6. Commit funds for universal preschool in 1998-99 with incremental allocations to achieve full implementation by 2008:
 - Use a combination of local, state, federal, and private funds for preschool programs and facilities but not at the expense of other education programs.
 - Fund universal preschool providers similarly to public school funding, with payments based on the average number of children served.

