In the midst of rapid gentrification and skyrocketing rents, leaders in Oakland have embarked on a 10-year strategy to build a system of support for young children growing up here. Their focus: children and families most impacted by the region’s vast economic inequity.

In Oakland Unified less than half of students of color enter school ready for kindergarten, compared to 82% of white students. As the city becomes more diverse—families are settling in Oakland from places like Guatemala, Yemen, and China—these disparities are growing. Leaders in the school district are partnering with philanthropies, community-based nonprofits, and local government to strengthen training for adults who work with young children to ensure all kids have what they need to succeed in school and in life.
WHO ARE OAKLAND’S YOUNG CHILDREN?

41% The share of children in Oakland’s highest-poverty neighborhoods who are not ready for kindergarten.*

27% Children in Oakland who are not ready for kindergarten.*

Children [ages 0–5] in Oakland living in poverty

$27% 73% Children in OUSD who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch

31% Share of children in OUSD who are dual language learners

72% Spanish
6% Cantonese
5.9% Arabic
2.5% Vietnamese
13.6% All other

*S Not ready for kindergarten is defined here as being developmentally vulnerable on at least one domain of the Early Development Instrument, a population measure of young children’s health, development, and school readiness.

Sources: California Department of Education, U.S. Census, Oakland Unified School District

SUPPORTING ADULTS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN

New investments to improve kindergarten readiness across the city:

$3.3 million from David & Lucile Packard Foundation since 2015

New cabinet-level position in early learning and director of quality enhancement and professional development

Focus on equity and responsiveness to young children of color and their families

Training for all adults who work with young children in order to strengthen adult-child interactions across the city
Oakland Unified is strengthening training and outreach in its early childhood programs by:

- Providing coaching from the New Teacher Center
- Training teachers in trauma-informed practices, language development, and social-emotional learning
- Partnering with family support providers and Head Start
- Providing needed funding for supplies

**Results:**

- **High Ratings**
  All 28 child development centers received a 4 or 5, the highest scores in the quality rating and improvement system, up from 18 in 2016.

- **Better Preparation**
  Professional development programs have been expanded and improved.

- **A More Collaborative Table**
  Strong relationships have been forged between community groups, early childhood educators, city and school district leaders.

**RECENT STATEWIDE REFORMS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS**

- $5 million to train early educators to work with dual language learners
- $5 million to increase the number of bilingual TK–12 teachers
- Annual grants to school districts to expand dual language immersion
- Stipends for training in early childhood for new transitional kindergarten teachers

“We’re developing teacher mentors and working to build capacity within our own team. Veteran preschool teachers are working with the New Teacher Center to coach newer teachers.”

– Drew Giles, former director of quality enhancement and professional development for early learning, Oakland Unified School District
Looking Ahead

Leaders in Oakland have built a model collaborative structure where leadership is shared between school district officials and those from community-based nonprofits, local philanthropy, and government. This collaborative structure helps make decisions about how to target new funding and how to reform systems to better support all young children in the city. Its focus on equity is helping to target resources to the children of color in the city who need them most. The school district, for example, is partnering with the City of Oakland Head Start to pilot a training program in trauma-informed classroom practices for preschool teachers. The central challenge is how to scale up this work to more and more schools so that it makes a real difference for all the children in Oakland.

“We’re really excited about the collaborative table we’ve built in Oakland. We’re working together so that all the adults who work with young children in our community have the tools they need to support that child’s development every day.”

- Priya Jagannathan, manager, Oakland Starting Smart and Strong