



August 19, 2020

ACTION ITEM

SUBJECT: INVESTING IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Strategic Priority Area 1: Children and Families

Goal 1.2. Early Learning: Children birth through age 5 benefit from high quality early education, early intervention, family engagement, and support that prepares all children to reach their optimal potential in school and life.

Strategic Priority Area 2: System and Network

Goal 2.1. Leadership as a Convener and Partner: Work with First 5 county commissions, state agencies, and other stakeholders to convene, align, collaborate on, support, and strengthen statewide efforts and initiatives to facilitate the creation of a seamless system of integrated and comprehensive programs and services to improve the status and outcomes for children prenatal through age 5 and their families.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

The early learning and care (ELC) sector has been badly hurt by COVID-19 and providers are struggling to stay open or reopen in order to meet child care needs. Families having access to quality ELC programs is essential to California's economic recovery. First 5 California (F5CA) can make strategic investments in creating a more efficient, high-quality ELC sector that better serves the needs of vulnerable families. F5CA's investment can leverage current investments, efficiencies, and partnerships to expand access to high-quality professional learning opportunities that target F5CA's target populations, such as family child care providers, and providers with limited access to professional development, such as those in rural or isolated areas of the state. Increased access to distance learning is more important now than ever. Just since March, there has been over a 60 percent increase in new profiles in the existing Early Childhood Education Workforce Registry, with nearly 9,000 new participants in just 3 months. Likewise, there has been a substantial increase in usage of the California Department of Education's (CDE) training portal, California Early Childhood Online (CECO). Completion of online courses increased approximately 1700 percent from February to May. But with that increase in usage, there is continuing need to further increase capacity and content. Access to education and training is needed for new providers, as well as to expand existing providers' knowledge in critical areas, including children's social and emotional development and trauma-informed care.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Commission approve a reallocation of \$1,000,000 to fund content development for a Professional Development Platform that will align with F5CA goals, priorities, and target populations. This is not a new funding request, but rather a request to shift IMPACT 2020 evaluation funds to support state infrastructure development.

BACKGROUND OF KEY ISSUES

The ELC sector provides an essential social and economically important service by supporting working families, enabling them to work, and facilitating children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. ELC programs have always been economically fragile, and the challenges introduced by COVID-19 have made it impossible for many programs to maintain operations. As California works to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, the workforce needs to be fully supported with access to a variety of professional development activities to meet all needs, including non-English speaking providers, those in rural and isolated communities, and those who are new to the field. A strategic reinvention of the sector, beginning with the workforce at the heart of ELC, is necessary to provide high-quality services, education, and care for children and their families.

An investment in workforce development and support is a key area where F5CA can provide catalytic investment and leadership that will greatly impact COVID-19 recovery on a statewide scale and for years to come.

This potential investment by F5CA aligns with its Strategic Plan, issues emerging from the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care (MPELC), the Administration's priorities for supporting the ELC sector, planned investments through the Preschool Development Grant Renewal (PDG-R), and priorities for partner state agencies, including the CDE, the California Health and Human Services Agency, and the California Department of Social Services.

As noted above, the ELC sector needs to be rebuilt, and no part of this rebuilding is more important than the workforce. This is an unprecedented time to develop a strong infrastructure to support the workforce across a comprehensive early childhood system, including, but not limited to, early childhood education, home visiting, child welfare, behavioral and mental health, and other family and social supports. The quality of services for children and families is largely dependent on knowledgeable adults who understand early brain science, the know-how to provide nurturing interactions that support children's development and learning, and how to support families to overcome adversity and obtain the services they need.

There are significant limitations to California's current Professional Development (PD) system: the state does not have a standard birth through age 5 teaching credential; professional requirements vary by program type and funding source; educational requirements vary from a high school diploma to an associate's or bachelor's degree, even when serving children of similar age and need; the workforce struggles with the transition from licensing requirements to college credits and from some college credits to degree attainment; there are significant limitations on articulation of college courses;

and there is uneven integration of practice-based content and peer feedback throughout all PD.

Through First 5 IMPACT, PDG, and CDE investments, California has been systematically developing its capacity to offer blended learning at scale, building on the best of online learning tools and community-based support to deliver job-embedded supports to build the skills of the early childhood workforce. F5CA has led the development of strengthening the overall workforce development system through developing a system for certifying coaches, as well as built significant Communities of Practice facilitation capacity throughout the state; this will be essential to the successful implementation of a blended workforce development platform.

Through PDG-R and some strategic investment of Child Care Development Block Grant funds, California will develop a robust, highly engaging professional development ecosystem for early childhood professionals in all settings.

Before the end of 2022, a total of 300 hours of highly engaging content on a wide range of topics will be developed for the ELC workforce. It will be designed to support blended learning in partnership with coaches and Community of Practice facilitators and can be integrated into programs within the broader early childhood system.

This sets an essential foundation on which we can build. F5CA can accelerate the development of this platform by:

- Creating new onboarding tools and pre-service training bundles to efficiently train new professionals
- Investing in additional content development for either ELC teachers or related fields such as home visitors or others
- Supporting partnerships with higher education to ensure content is available for college credits
- Developing user-friendly tools critical to supporting the post-COVID response – such as videos, short courses, online forums – to help professionals support the mental health needs of children and targeted resources to support the self-care and mental health of providers

By integrating the training platform and relevant content across the early learning system, further development of the system will be bolstered by an intentional focus on overcoming barriers to access. For additional information regarding development of the platform, see California's Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Renewal application at <https://www.chhs.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/California-PDG-B-5-Renewal-File-One.pdf>.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND ACTION

The Commission was previously presented with the initial concept of this investment on May 22, 2020.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

An investment in workforce development and support is recommended to be one-time funding at \$1,000,000 from the current IMPACT 2020 authorization. Due to COVID-19, the state budget, and the forthcoming MPELC, money currently allocated to IMPACT 2020 evaluation can be repurposed to better meet the direct needs of providers, children, and families. This will not have any fiscal impact on ongoing revenue. Sufficient funding of \$2 million dollars will remain for evaluation of IMPACT 2020.

