



2019-20 Pro-Kid Policy Agenda for California

The 2019–20 Pro-Kid Policy Agenda for California is the comprehensive roadmap at the state level to ensure that all children have the necessary supports to reach their full potential. California has an obligation to end systemic injustices that create barriers to kids of color, as well as kids living in poverty and undocumented kids, from growing up healthy and ready for college, career, and civic life. We urge policymakers to use the Pro-Kid Agenda as a guide to ensure California’s systems for children are equitable, well-funded, high-quality, and accountable to kids’ success.

Doing right by all kids is not only the right thing to do, it’s essential to our state’s ability to thrive. Our continued economic growth and strong democracy is dependent on a healthy and educated workforce. State policymakers urgently need to make smart, strategic, and quality investments in California’s children to address poverty and close the widening income divide. Working together, we can build a California where all children have the chance to live out their dreams. The Pro-Kid Agenda can help us get there.

The Agenda was compiled by Children Now, the only research, policy development, and advocacy organization covering the full-range of key children’s issues, from prenatal through age 26, including early childhood development, K-12, higher education, children’s health, foster care, and youth justice. Children Now coordinates The Children’s Movement of California—a member-based constituency supporting kids that now includes more than 3,000 business, parent, labor, civil rights, faith, and community organizations. The organization also leads, co-leads or participates in more than 80 coalitions around the state. The Agenda reflects the top priorities of each of those coalitions and their members. For questions or comments about the Agenda, please email agenda@childrennow.org

Education

Infant & Toddler Care

California policymakers must ensure all families with infants and toddlers have access to enriching, stable, and affordable child care, especially foster families, families in poverty, and other families experiencing circumstances of need or risk. In the near-term, the state should at least triple the number of infants and toddlers that receive state-funded child care services while simultaneously investing in the infrastructure necessary to ensure all eligible infants and toddlers in the state have access to quality care, including workforce development and facilities. Restructuring the rate system for financing programs and to incentivize quality improvement is also critical.

Preschool & Transitional Kindergarten

While California policymakers have expanded investments in its State Preschool Program and established a transitional kindergarten program, the state must align and elevate quality standards across programs and build out the workforce and infrastructure necessary to ensure that all 3- and 4-year olds have access to high quality early learning opportunities. Providing more resources to State Preschool and Head Start, particularly focused on 3-year-olds, can help achieve this goal, as well as facilitating the expansion of early learning programs in all school districts. In doing so, districts must be incentivized to lower student-teacher ratios in Transitional Kindergarten classrooms and ensure developmentally appropriate, full-day experiences for students.

Early Learning Workforce Compensation & Training

California must develop a coherent strategy to unify and advance the early care and education workforce, including scaling quality improvement and workforce development initiatives that support improved skills, professional growth, and economic well-being of these currently undervalued educators. In the short term, a restructured reimbursement rate system for the state's subsidized system must account for higher compensation to improve workforce stability and reduce turnover. The state must also invest in strengthening the ability of higher education institutions to train the current and upcoming workforce, as well direct supports to incentivize further training and professional development, raise permit and credentialing standards over time, and ensure pay is commensurate with higher qualifications.

Education for Dual & English Language Learners

California policymakers must promote bilingualism by incentivizing bilingual educational opportunities for all children. At a minimum, this should include ensuring children who are dual language and English learners have the support necessary to develop their knowledge and skills in both their home language and in English, all while ensuring access to rigorous core content and with a focus on eliminating achievement gaps. To make progress toward this goal, policymakers should invest at the state and regional levels to help build the capacity of educators (PreK-12) to implement integrated and designated English Language Development (ELD) and leverage the recently-adopted English Language (EL) Roadmap.

Integrated Data & Information Systems

Practice, policy, and research needs to be informed by useful and timely information to enable transparency, identify needs, and improve outcomes. Policymakers must ensure that both the early learning and higher education sectors have effective information systems in place and that those systems are linked to TK-12 and workforce data. With the foundation of a comprehensive education information system in place, children would be more effectively served with data linkages to health and social services as well. Simultaneously, policymakers should provide resources and training to help integrate, use, and protect available data to support improvements in local policies and practices, building upon existing data collaborative efforts.

TK-12 Funding

California schools have fewer educators and caring adults on campus per student than almost any other state in the country. The deficiency of staffing has the most impact on students in poverty, with language barriers, with special needs, who are foster youth or experience other factors that require targeted support. California policymakers must provide sufficient funding to address understaffing of our schools. In the near term, the state should change recent practices that have led to the Proposition 98 minimum funding guarantee being treated as a maximum, instead of a minimum, funding level. Overall funding needs to increase faster than the general cost pressures schools face, including those of special education, pensions, health benefits, facilities, and other costs. Policymakers should also set a new, higher target for the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), including ensuring that LCFF Supplemental and Concentration dollars actually provide a higher level of service and ultimately improve outcomes for the students that generate those funds.

Academic Outcomes

California policymakers are obligated to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college, career, and civic life. To track this goal, in the near-term state leaders should continue to build a state accountability system that uses multiple measures, not just academic achievement. Additionally, they should adopt a growth model to ensure that individual students are making sufficient progress from year to year in order to more accurately report student achievement and gaps based on racial inequities. Policymakers must also continue to develop the Statewide System of Support to be comprehensive and infuse continuous improvement across the state. This system must provide greater transparency on whether gaps in achievement are closing. When improvement is needed, all schools, districts, charters, and county offices should have access to timely support to meet their unique needs.

STEM Education

California policymakers must make continuous, high-quality Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) instruction a core element of every child's education, especially for children of color and girls. In the near-term, policymakers must build statewide capacity to prepare, support, and deliver teaching and learning to the new math, science, and computer science standards. Meanwhile, district leaders must plan for, and increase, their investments in multi-year implementation of standards-based curriculum and instruction.

Community Schools

California policymakers must support the development of student- and community-focused schools by promoting parent engagement and high quality instruction, while at the same time enabling better coordination and collaboration between schools, afterschool and summer programs, early learning programs, medical, dental, and mental health care providers, and social services. In the near term, policymakers should establish a California Children's Cabinet to develop a shared vision on child outcomes from birth to college and career, ensure better data sharing, promote investment in children's services and work to align resources and systems.

Teacher Pipeline, Preparation, Placement & Retention

California policymakers must ensure that preparation and ongoing professional learning for all teachers and administrators is based on restorative, trauma-informed, culturally-responsive practices that promote social-emotional learning. Further, suspensions and expulsions for defiance/disruption should be eliminated for all students. Policymakers must also develop and require common surveys to measure school climate and student engagement, continue to make substantial investments in research-based practices through the Multi-Tiered System of Support framework and the Proposition 47 grant program and consider other sources of support such as Proposition 64.

School Climate & Discipline

California policymakers must ensure that preparation and ongoing professional learning for all teachers and administrators is based on restorative, trauma-informed, culturally-responsive practices that promote social-emotional learning. Further, suspensions and expulsions for defiance/disruption should be eliminated for all students. Policymakers must also develop and require common surveys to measure school climate and student engagement, continue to make substantial investments in research-based practices through the Multi-Tiered System of Support framework and the Proposition 47 grant program and consider other sources of support such as Proposition 64.

Chronic Absence

As a state priority under LCFF, California policymakers and district leaders must carefully monitor the recently reported increase in chronic absenteeism, provide support for a professional learning community, and provide incentives for improving attendance. Chronic absence data should also be counted for accountability purposes in high school, in addition to the existing grades K-8, and used by all schools as an early warning sign for systemic and individual student needs.

Afterschool & Summer Learning Programs

California policymakers must sustain and build on proven afterschool and summer programs so all kids, particularly children of color, children living in poverty, and other children experiencing circumstances of need or risk, have access to safe environments that allow them to be active and engaged after school and during the summer. In the near-term, policymakers should support quality improvement efforts to increase investments in afterschool and summer programs and ensure all students have access.

Access to Higher Education

California policymakers must make good on the promise of an accessible and affordable system of public higher education. Our leaders need to reinvest in the University of California, California State University, and community colleges, and remove the often insurmountable barriers of attending college, such as the high cost of tuition and housing, food insecurity, and limited access to childcare for students with children. Our state leaders must also develop long-term plans to accommodate more students, close the attainment gap, provide adequate and stable funding, increase graduation rates and create accountability through transparency and measuring performance.

Health



Home Visiting

California policymakers should significantly expand voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs that match new and expectant parents with trained professionals that provide one-on-one support and education during these critical early years. The state must identify sustainable funding, prioritize families most in need of support and ensure that programs are effective, high-quality and responsive to the diverse needs of families.

Developmental Screenings & Early Intervention

California policymakers must ensure that young children receive routine developmental, behavioral and other health screenings at the intervals recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, and invest in robust referral and early intervention systems to connect kids with services they may need for supporting their healthy growth and development. In the near-term, the California Health and Human Services Agency should leverage all available data to improve the rate of kids receiving developmental screenings and needed early intervention services.

Health Insurance

California policymakers must ensure that every single kid is enrolled in health coverage and is receiving comprehensive and consistent benefits across public and private insurance carriers, so that all families can access high-quality, affordable care for their children. In the near-term, the California Department of Health Care Services should work to enroll all eligible-but-currently-uninsured California children and pregnant women into Medi-Cal coverage. It is also critical that federal investments in and commitments to Medicaid and other health care programs remain strong. The state should continue to fight against damaging federal changes, such as the proposed changes to the public charge rule, to protect California children's health coverage and wellbeing.

Health Care Access & Accountability

California policymakers must invest the resources needed to ensure that families can access culturally-appropriate health care for their children in a timely way, and ensure the collection of data that will hold the Medi-Cal system accountable for actually delivering quality medical, dental and mental health care for children. There must also be a commitment to reducing the racial, socioeconomic, language and geographic disparities in children's health care access and outcomes. In the near-term, the California Department of Health Care Services must proactively promote quality improvement of health care services delivery for children, and innovatively use Medi-Cal policy options to address the health care, social and environmental determinants of burdensome, chronic pediatric conditions, like asthma.

Mental Health & Building Resilience

California policymakers must help children stay well and build resilience by providing mental health prevention and treatment services to support children's social, emotional and developmental health, especially for children with exposure to trauma. Policymakers must identify ways to improve care coordination between medical and mental health, expand the availability of mental health and trauma screenings in pediatric offices, early learning settings and schools, and reform how counties provide care.

Oral Health Care

California policymakers must ensure all kids have access to timely dental care and should invest in preventive services to treat kids where they are more likely to be, including screenings in schools, early learning programs, and pediatrician's offices where problems can be identified and children can be referred to dental providers. Policymakers must also scale local models like data-sharing agreements between a child's doctor and dentist, using community health workers to help parents and caregivers make and keep appointments, and using virtual dental homes to bring care to areas where there is limited access.

School-Based Health Services

California policymakers should increase access to health services and screenings in all early learning settings and schools as well as dramatically increasing the number of school-based health centers, so that more kids are able to access physical, mental, vision and dental health services. In the near-term, the California Departments of Education and Health Care Services should work together to streamline financing for school districts that want to provide health care services to their students. Policies should also be in place that promote and leverage Medi-Cal reimbursement to schools for their role as important sites for health screenings, administrative linkages, and care coordination. The state should also invest in increasing the capacity and infrastructure of county health departments to provide and coordinate more health services in early learning settings and schools.

Food Security

California's policymakers must dramatically increase our state's low participation rates in child and family nutrition support programs. Policymakers must also focus on increasing access to healthy food choices for kids in and out of school, and supporting children's physical activity. In the near-term, policymakers should reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages by implementing a statewide soda tax.

Child Welfare

Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention

More than 67,000 California children are confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect each year, underscoring the need for policymakers to support a statewide prevention program for kids at risk of abuse and neglect. The program should support families, enhance parenting skills, promote healthy relationships, expand early identification and intervention services, keep kids safe from maltreatment, and, when possible, work to keep kids and families together.

Placement Stability & Permanent Connections

California policymakers must ensure children and youth in foster care and their caregivers have access to the resources, supports and services they need to build strong family relationships. The state must develop and implement policies to minimize both placement instability and youth institutionalization, including access to childcare, immediate trauma-informed supports, and comprehensive assessments of children's needs and strengths. The California Department of Social Services must also carefully implement Continuum of Care Reform to create a system of supports and services that help improve the outcomes for our children and youth in care.

Health Care for Kids in Foster Care

California policymakers must ensure that children in foster care—who may experience a myriad of health difficulties due to their past trauma, abuse, and neglect—have appropriate access to comprehensive health care, including the mental health services they need to heal from trauma. In the near-term, policymakers should increase state oversight and accountability to ensure children in foster care have timely access to the full continuum of physical, mental, and oral health services.

Education Support for Students in Foster Care

California policymakers must ensure that children in foster care, who face unique educational barriers related to school instability and trauma that can impair their ability to focus, receive the supports they need to succeed in school. In the near-term, policymakers must ensure that LCFF benefits students in foster care as intended, by keeping schools accountable for success of youth in foster care.

Housing Instability for Youth in Foster Care

California policymakers must ensure youth currently and formerly in foster care can easily access transitional housing programs and remain in these programs. While the state has a continuum of transitional housing programs for this population, many of these young people still experience homelessness after age 18. Young adults often encounter long program waitlists and multiple other barriers to get into transitional housing programs, and, once admitted, they may be kicked out for minor infractions. Policymakers must increase the capacity of transitional housing programs to address these barriers which, coupled with California's shortage of affordable housing options, leave vulnerable young people homeless during critical junctures in their lives.

Youth Justice

California policymakers must incentivize the use of evidence-based youth justice programs and increase oversight of juvenile justice agencies. Trauma-responsive justice systems grounded in adolescent development yield better outcomes for youth, reduce racial inequities, and increase public safety more effectively than punishment alone.