

2020 Pro-Kid Agenda

The 2020 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 tear down the structural barriers to all kids, especially kids of color, from growing up healthy, safe, 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 must urgently 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 children's health, education, child welfare, and family supports, and for adolescents and transition age youth. Children Now coordinates The Children's Movement of California®—a member-based constituency supporting kids that now includes more than 3,570 business, parent, labor, civil rights, faith, and community organizations. The organization also leads, co-leads or participates in more than 90 statewide and local coalitions around the state. The Agenda reflects the top priorities of each of those various coalitions and their members. For questions or comments about the Agenda, please email agenda@childrennow.org.





Health

Health Insurance

California policymakers must ensure that every single child is enrolled in health coverage and receiving comprehensive and consistent benefits across public and private insurance plans, 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 streamline enrollment for all eligible-but-currently-uninsured California children and pregnant women into Medi-Cal coverage. The state should continue to fight against damaging federal proposals, such as restrictive and punitive changes to immigration laws and poverty calculations, to protect California children's health coverage and well-being.

Health Care Accountability

California policymakers must make kids the first priority in health care. Our leaders should ensure that the state is paying a fair rate for the services that kids need, and that kids are actually receiving those services. California should have strongest-in-the-nation contracts with Medi-Cal managed care plans that reward improvement in child health and are also closely monitored and effectively enforced to guarantee children will get the care they need. In the near-term, the state should implement all recommendations from the March 2019 State Auditor report to improve accountability for EPSDT care, including improving auditing procedures and requiring health plans to do a better job collecting and using data. The state needs to comprehensively collect and analyze a full range of data to effectively hold the Medi-Cal system accountable for payments made to deliver quality medical, dental, and behavioral health care for children that is required by federal law.

Health Care Access

California policymakers must prioritize improving families' access to culturally-appropriate health care providers for their children in a timely way. In particular, there must be a stronger and more proactive focus on 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 promote better access and quality improvement of health care service delivery for children. The state should also prioritize children's access needs when exploring Medi-Cal reforms or policy options to innovatively address the health care, social, and environmental conditions that can exacerbate chronic problems, like pediatric asthma.



Preventive Screenings

California policymakers must ensure that every young child receives required routine developmental, behavioral, and other preventive health screenings in a timely way and at the intervals recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Also, to meet the requirements of federal law, the state must 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 publicly report out and take action on all available data to improve the rate of kids receiving developmental screenings in Medi-Cal, and identify ways to strengthen and expand linkages to needed early intervention services.

Behavioral Health Care

California policymakers need to prioritize policies and programs that work across sectors to prevent behavioral health challenges as well as promptly and effectively treat difficulties that arise. In the near-term, the state should create a comprehensive plan to completely overhaul the current system because it has been unable to properly identify youth in need and provide supports. This plan must identify target metrics that will move the state forward on improving children's mental health outcomes, such as dramatically reducing youth suicides. The plan should also determine optimal inputs for child and youth wellness, such as increasing peer support workers, boosting youth mental health first aid training for those who work with kids, and greatly expanding preventive services that do not require a diagnosis.

Preventing Trauma & Supporting Healing

California's leaders must work together across sectors to implement policies to prevent childhood trauma, such as mandating training for all child-serving professionals, providing proactive coping skills coaching for all students via Multi-Tiered System of Support approaches at all schools, and scaling up parenting support programs.^{38,39} The state must also support the healing and wellness of children who have already endured trauma, through routine screening, referral to services for the child and their family, and follow up. In the near-term, the state should ensure strong implementation of the new trauma screenings benefit in Medi-Cal, providing clarity on connections between trained pediatric providers, trauma-informed pediatric settings, thorough and thoughtful screenings, and robust linkages to needed services.



Oral Health Care

California should achieve the vision of every child being cavity free at age three. To do so, policymakers must ensure all kids in Medi-Cal have access to timely dental services, and prioritize investments in preventive service programs that reach kids where they are, such as child care locations, schools, WIC centers, and pediatricians' offices. Tobacco tax revenue should remain dedicated to incentivizing Medi-Cal Dental providers and recruiting additional providers in high-need areas. The state should ensure that school districts have sufficient resources – outside of education dollars if needed – to collect Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment data. Policymakers should also scale local models like data-sharing agreements between a child's doctor and dentist, using community health workers to help caregivers make and keep dental appointments, and using virtual dental homes to bring care to areas where access is limited.

Food Security

California's leaders must ensure that every child has access to nutritious food, and at the very least that every eligible child is enrolled in CalFresh, school meals, and other nutrition supports. Policymakers must also dramatically increase access to healthy food choices for kids in and out of school. In the near-term, the state should make nutrition assistance benefits accessible to all California children experiencing need, regardless of immigration status; expand access to universally free school meals to more students across the state; and ensure that no child loses access to CalFresh or school meals due to proposed federal cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.



Education

Infant & Toddler Care California policymakers must ensure all families with infants and toddlers have the ability to access child care in a variety of settings that are high-quality, stable, and affordable. It is especially important to ensure foster families, families in poverty, and other families experiencing need or risk have this critical support. 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 targeting resources for workforce development and facilities. It is also critical to restructure rates in order to rationalize the finance system and incentivize quality improvement.

Preschool & Transitional Kindergarten The state must ensure high-quality, universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds and align and elevate quality metrics across programs, including student-teacher ratios, professional standards, and environmental factors. In the near-term, it should expand access to State Preschool for 3-year-olds; lower student-teacher ratios in transitional kindergarten classrooms to ensure developmental appropriateness; and provide more wraparound care to allow for parents' varying work hours and ensure children have supportive services that enable them to learn. Finally, the state should leverage federal early learning investments including better coordination with Head Start and Early Head Start.

Early Care & Education Workforce California must elevate early care and education as a profession, by raising education and experience standards over time, ensuring compensation rises commensurate with higher qualifications, and building future expansions of preschool and child care upon the foundation of a highly skilled, well-compensated workforce. Greater investment is needed in a coordinated quality improvement and workforce development system that supports individuals in gaining research-based competencies and skills, as well as the implementation of a statewide workforce registry. In the near-term, essential work includes articulating competencies, qualifications, and related career advancement pathways. In addition, it is critical to restructure financing and rates to raise compensation and stabilize the workforce, over time bringing pay to parity with the TK-12 workforce for equivalent education and training.



Early Intervention & Special Education

Every California child who needs special education supports should get them, seamlessly, and as early as possible. The state must ensure every eligible child has access to an accountable, results-oriented, continuum of cradle-to-career special education supports and services. In early childhood, this means ensuring universal developmental screening and significantly expanding and improving early intervention services. In the TK-12 system, the state must improve the quality of services and invest sufficiently in special education to keep pace with need.

Education for Dual Language & English Learners

California policymakers must promote an asset-based approach to children's bilingualism by providing supports to students to learn English as well as strengthening their home language. The state should recognize the benefits of bilingualism for all students. At a minimum, this should include ensuring children who are dual language and English Learners have the support necessary to develop knowledge and skills in both their home language and English, while providing rigorous core content with a focus on creating equity in opportunities and eliminating achievement gaps. Policymakers should continue to invest at the state and regional levels to build educators' capacity to implement the English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework, and leverage the English Learner Roadmap. California must ensure that Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) supplemental and concentration grant funds are directly benefiting English Learners, as the law intended, and also continue to improve the accountability system to truly highlight English Learners' achievements and needs.

Education Funding

Policymakers should address the state's severe underfunding of education, both through prioritization in the state budget and through the ballot, to place California among the top funded states. Overall funding needs to increase much faster than the general cost pressures education faces, including those of special education, pensions, health benefits, and facilities. Policymakers should set a new, higher target for the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), and implement effective transparency mechanisms, including a standardized approach for accounting, to ensure an equitable distribution of funding. And, a single negotiated revenue measure focused solely on education (quality child care, preschool, TK-12, and higher education) should be placed on the November 2020 state ballot.



STEM Education

All California kids need to graduate high school ready to succeed in the 21st century economy, and that requires a high-quality STEM education – whether they go to college, further career education, or the workforce – and regardless of whether the occupation is STEM-based. Policymakers must make continuous, high-quality STEM instruction a core element of every child’s education from the youngest age. Specifically, policymakers need to make immediate and significant investments in our statewide capacity to prepare, support, and deliver teaching and learning to the state’s math, science, and computer science standards. That means more and better-prepared teachers, high-quality instructional materials, and fully-equipped classrooms for all kids. Simultaneously, district and school leaders must plan for, increase, and be held accountable for their investments in the multi-year implementation of standards-based curriculum and instruction, particularly in STEM, for all kids.

Teacher Pipeline & Retention

California policymakers must address the diminishing pipeline of new educators, improve the preparation of these new educators, and provide high-quality professional learning for all educators to help ensure they are supported, effective, and stay in the profession. Policymakers must also establish a fair, meaningful, and objective feedback and evaluation system for teachers. The state has a responsibility to ensure that kids of color and kids from low-income families are not disproportionately served by ineffective, out-of-field, and/or inexperienced teachers. In the near-term, policymakers should continue to increase investments in improving the pipeline and quality of new teachers, provide high-quality professional learning through California’s System of Support, and monitor the equitable distribution of educators.

School Climate: Caring Professionals at School

California must move from the bottom of the country in terms of teacher, school nurse, administrator, and counselor ratios to ranking among the top ten states, to ensure students have sufficient access to more adults on campus which will provide much needed supports, services, and relationships to improve school climate. In addition to increasing education funding, the state must ensure that counties and other government agencies charged with providing health and social services to kids are providing those supports at schools, where the kids already are, or at least ensuring easy access to those services, including transportation support when needed.



School Climate: Discipline & Attendance

California policymakers must promote systemic changes in our schools to significantly improve students' experiences, ensure a non-punitive and positive school climate, and increase student engagement and connectedness. Preparation and ongoing professional learning for all teachers and administrators should be based on restorative, trauma-informed, culturally-responsive practices that promote social-emotional learning. Further, suspensions and expulsions for defiance or disruption should be eliminated for all students. California must continue to track chronic absence, investigate its root causes, and develop effective strategies to improve attendance. Policymakers should also develop and require common surveys to measure school climate, to identify problems and track progress over time. In addition, state leaders should continue to make substantial investments of Proposition 47 dollars designated for at-risk students, and other funding, for research-based practices through the Multi-Tiered System of Support framework to match service levels with student need.

Afterschool & Summer Learning Programs

California should have enough quality afterschool and summer programs available to serve every student who wants to participate. To reach that goal, policymakers must build on proven, quality afterschool and summer programs so all kids – particularly children experiencing racism, poverty, or other circumstances of need or risk – have access to safe environments where they can be active and engaged. Many children and youth are on waiting lists for a spot in an afterschool program. In the near-term, policymakers should support efforts to improve quality, increase investments in afterschool and summer programs, and ensure all students have access.

Higher Education

California policymakers 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 child care 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.



Family Supports

**Voluntary
Evidence-Based
Home Visiting**

California policymakers must continue to significantly expand voluntary evidence-based home visiting programs statewide, so that these effective programs reach every low-income family who wants them. To ensure families have maximal access to home visiting through a variety of pathways, and that programs are high-quality and responsive to the diverse circumstances of families, the state must leverage multifaceted funding – including maximizing the use of federal Medicaid dollars – and align and coordinate efforts across state departments and at the local level.

Paid Family Leave

California must put families first by guaranteeing at least six months paid family leave per child, and ensuring leave is affordable and accessible for all types of families. In the near-term, the state should continue to extend duration of leave to 12 weeks per parent/guardian in 2020-21, and aggressively pursue policies, such as boosting the wage replacement percentage, to eliminate the disparity for families of color and families who are low-income utilizing PFL in California.

**Income Assistance
for Low-income
Families**

All California families should have the basic income needed to house and feed their children. In the near-term, the state must expand and enhance income assistance programs, including CalWORKs, EITC, and the child tax credit, with the focus on families with young children, families in deepest poverty, and families with mixed immigration status.



Child Welfare

Stable Homes & Enduring Relationships

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 and maintain strong family relationships. Policies must be implemented that maximize placement stability, avoid the institutionalization of traumatized youth, and increase access to trauma-informed supports. In the near-term, California must address its shortage of caregivers and increase recruitment and retention of high-quality caregivers able to meet the needs of children in foster care in family-based settings, especially children with more intensive needs.

Health Care for Kids in Foster Care

California policymakers must ensure that all children in foster care have access to comprehensive health care, including the behavioral health services they need to heal from the trauma of abuse and neglect and removal. In the near-term, policymakers should increase provider capacity and oversight and accountability to ensure children in foster care have timely access to community-based services and experience continuity of care with trusted providers. Policymakers should also continue to promote cross-system collaboration between child welfare and health to ensure children in foster care receive timely, coordinated services, and improve data tracking to assess the quality and impact of services.

Education Supports for Students in Foster Care

California policymakers must ensure that all children in foster care receive the supports they need to succeed in school. Specifically, the state must vastly improve the dismal graduation rate of youth in foster care so that it meets or exceeds that of all other student groups. In the near-term, policymakers must ensure that youth in foster care experience school stability, including strengthening their right to remain in their school of origin when it is in their best interest to do so. Policymakers should also provide stronger oversight of LCFF to ensure funding is being used to provide the critical services foster youth need to overcome educational obstacles, and that Local Control and Accountability Plans incorporate planning and accountability that adequately address the needs of youth in foster care.



Adolescents & Transition Age Youth

Relationships & Sexual Health Education

California's leaders need to ensure all youth receive proactive education about healthy relationships and sexual health in developmentally appropriate ways. In the near-term, policymakers should improve monitoring of California Healthy Youth Act implementation across the state so that all youth are learning about sexual and reproductive health and building the skills necessary for healthy relationships, regardless of where they live, their gender identity, or sexual orientation. The state should also increase resources for public health agencies to track, treat, and prevent the spread of STIs.

Supports for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

California policymakers must ensure no young person is homeless or forced to live in unsafe situations. Special attention should be paid to youth exiting the child welfare and juvenile justice systems who can experience barriers accessing and maintaining stable housing. In the near-term, policymakers should ensure that young people are prioritized in all housing policies and should allocate additional funding to strengthen youth access to a continuum of housing options. Additionally, the state must provide targeted resources to support the success of college students experiencing homelessness, such as increasing access to on-campus housing, shelter during school breaks, and food.

Decriminalization of Youth

California must ensure a supportive environment for youth in the juvenile justice system so they have opportunities to transform and improve their lives. Trauma-responsive justice systems that are grounded in adolescent development, including diversion programs, yield better outcomes for youth, reduce racial inequities, and increase public safety more effectively than punishment alone. In the near-term, policymakers should focus on increasing access to diversion programs, limiting the use of secure detention, and keeping detained youth close to their communities where they have the best chance to heal and thrive.

Opportunities for Youth Voice & Civic Engagement

State leaders must work to involve and amplify the voice of young people, especially low-income youth and youth of color, in decision-making by offering varied, numerous opportunities for civic education and engagement in supportive settings. Specifically, models like the Youth Engagement Project of the California Department of Social Services, which builds capacity for youth in foster care to provide policy input, should be replicated in other departments and agencies so that more youth can weigh in on policy issues that impact their lives. Policymakers should also require the Department of Education to develop civics curriculum materials and a corresponding implementation toolkit to support a pathway to the high school State Seal of Civic Engagement. In addition, leaders should make it easy for 16- and 17-year-olds to register or pre-register to vote before they leave high school.



Coordinated Systems

**Connected
Cradle-to-Career
Systems**

Policymakers must ensure that government systems are linked to provide first-class coordination and support to children and families. In the near term, this includes building an early learning data infrastructure and ensuring the early learning, TK-12, higher education and workforce data systems are all linked together. With the foundation of a comprehensive education information system in place, children could be even more effectively served through additional linkages to health and social services. 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 collaborative efforts.