

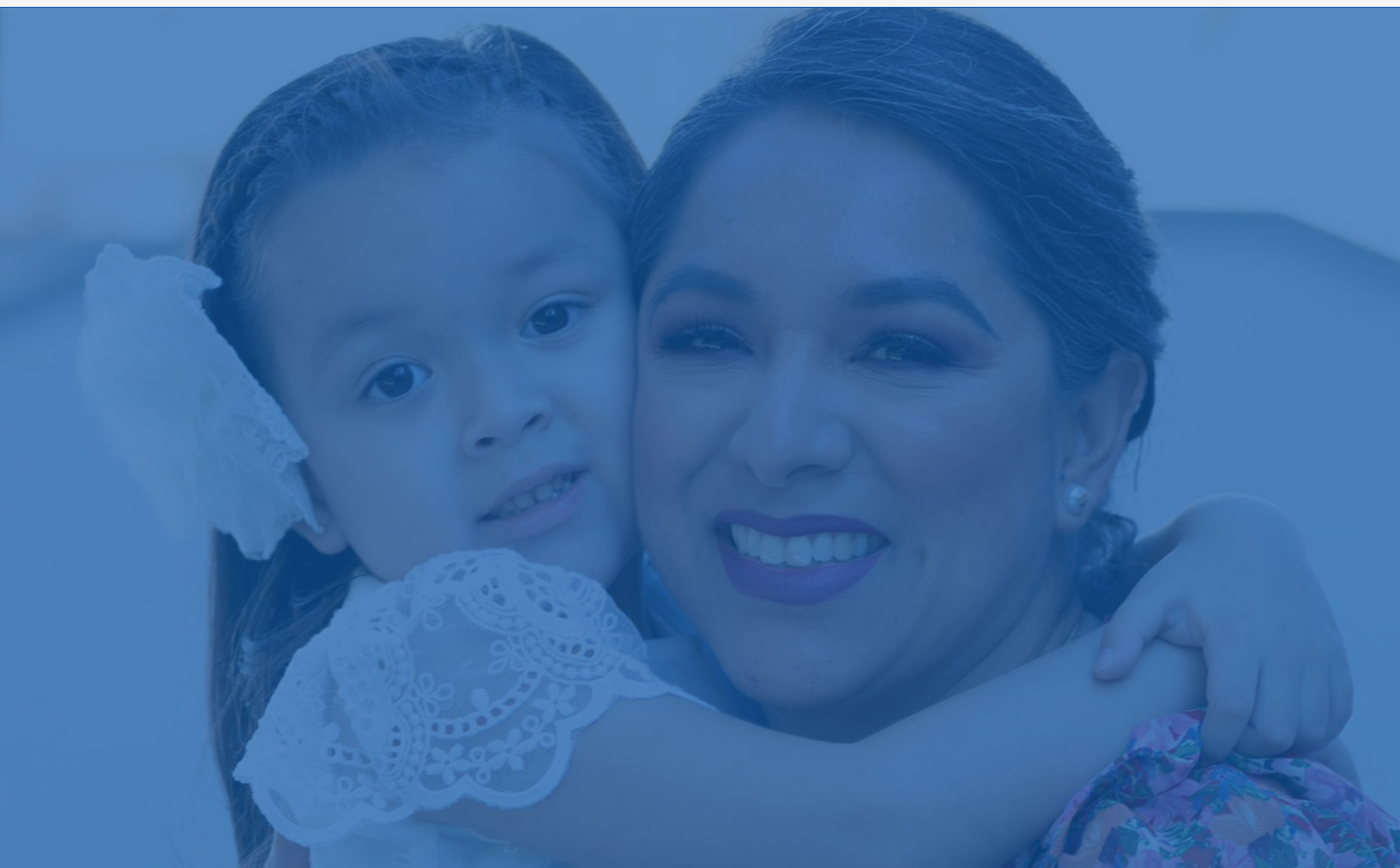


Parent
Organization
Network

Breaking Through Barriers

Through the Eyes of Parents:

California's Flawed Implementation of
Universal Transitional Kindergarten



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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California's Flawed Implementation of Universal Transitional Kindergarten

I. Summary

Our parent focus group findings provided important insight into parents' concerns, experiences, and their understanding of the [implementation of Transitional Kindergarten \(TK\)](#) in California. Our findings show the implementation of TK is notably flawed, particularly in three crucial areas: a lack of outreach and communication with parents, problems with the TK classroom and facilities, and a lack of family engagement. The lack of communication made it more difficult for parents who took part in PON's focus group sessions to learn about TK availability, enrollment procedures, and the advantages of high-quality TK instruction. Classroom issues such as non-compliance with student-teacher ratios, combined TK/K classrooms, and inadequate infrastructure and drop-off protocols were also of great concern. Furthermore, parents expressed a deep desire for better teacher-parent communication, more meaningful engagement opportunities in the classroom, and the opportunity to provide input on TK program development. The findings underscore the urgent need for structural improvement to ensure the success and effectiveness of the TK program. This goal will be achieved only when these concerns are addressed so they can foster the academic success and well-being of all students.

II. Introduction

High-quality Early Childhood Education (ECE), in particular, Universal Transitional Kindergarten (UTK) programs, can have long-lasting positive effects, especially for children from low-income or historically marginalized families. A preponderance of [research evidence](#) shows high-quality Transitional Kindergarten (TK) programs can play a significant role in reducing education inequalities that lead to an "[achievement gap](#)" for English Learners. In addition to its direct impact on children, TK can offer support to families and contribute to the economy by providing a secure and nurturing setting for young children while their parents or caretakers are at work.

Understanding the broad positive effects of high-quality ECE programs, [Governor Gavin Newsom](#) made

Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) a central component of his administration’s education strategy. Most recently, the main focus of California’s UPK initiatives has been the [statewide implementation of UTK](#). Starting with the 2022–23 school year, school districts are required to offer Transitional Kindergarten (TK) to [younger students each year](#), eventually providing access to TK for all 4-year-olds by the 2025–26 school year. To support the creation of a new public school “grade,” California provided \$1.2 billion in one-time funding between school years 2021–22 and 2022–23 for facility improvements, planning, and workforce development.

Despite the widespread recognition of the benefits of UTK for children, families, equity, and society as a whole, our parent focus group findings illuminated the stunted implementation of TK programs in school districts, that to date, are largely falling short of the aspirational UPK goal of addressing socio-economic and demographic ECE inequalities.

Key Points

- A high-quality TK program is an important tool in closing the achievement gap for BIPOC students, however, parents expressed concern their schools were falling short of providing a quality program
- Parent feedback starkly illuminated a lack of outreach and communication by important stakeholders, including local school districts, their current preschool providers, and community-based groups.
- Parents expressed concerns with the TK classrooms and school facilities, including issues related to combined TK/K classrooms, and inadequate staffing to comply with teacher-student ratios. Parents were frustrated their school’s effort to ease the transition from preschool to TK was insensitive and not age-appropriate.
- Parents overwhelmingly noted the absence of family engagement and yearned for more opportunities to meaningfully engage with teachers and other educators.

Recommendations for Schools

- Retrain educators on new credentialing requirements, which integrate culture and family engagement in student learning in grades TK through 2nd grade.
- Orientate parents and students to the TK environment by utilizing pre-enrollment campus tours and TK information sessions.
- Enlist the support of teacher aides and parent volunteers to improve the classroom experience.

Our findings and recommendations are the result of:

- Five focus group sessions with more than 40 parents of children ages 3-6 participating;
- A review of existing research to understand best [TK practices across the country](#);
- A review of state-mandated Local Education Agency (LEA) [TK implementation directives](#);
- A review of the current state of [California ECE policy](#).

III. The UPK Promise: High-Quality ECE Programs to Close the Achievement Gap

Extensive research consistently supports the [positive outcomes associated with participation in high-quality TK programs](#). These studies have revealed a range of benefits, including improved kindergarten readiness, enhanced cognitive development, better physical and mental health, and long-term advantages such as higher high school graduation rates, reduced involvement in juvenile delinquency and crime, and higher income in adulthood. A high-quality transitional kindergarten program presents a pivotal opportunity to cultivate early learning skills and readiness in Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color (BIPOC) children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research demonstrates that children from low-income families frequently begin kindergarten with academic, social, and behavioral competencies below their more affluent peers. This [preparation gap](#) stems from insufficient resources and developmental opportunities provided during critical early childhood years. A properly implemented high-quality TK program can begin to address these disparities with foundational skill-building and enriching instruction led by credentialed and caring teachers. A high-quality TK program aims to create a more level playing field so demographic and socio-economic circumstances are less determinative of academic outcomes as children embark on their K-12 education.

What Constitutes a High-Quality TK program?

An environment that recognizes and values the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students; kindergarten-experienced credentialed teachers; intentional transition preparation; universally accessible classrooms; academic skill-building, and support for social-emotional growth.

- A high-quality transitional kindergarten program offers a nurturing and inclusive learning environment that recognizes and values the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. It fosters an atmosphere where all student identities are celebrated, and their languages are respected. This creates a positive and empowering educational experience that promotes self-esteem, engagement, and a sense of belonging.
- Research has found the impact of TK was robust across different classroom characteristics and instructional quality, suggesting credentialed kindergarten teachers - bachelor's degree-level teachers with kindergarten teaching experience - are a key element of TK's effectiveness.
- Curricula and classrooms that facilitate the transition to kindergarten - TK classrooms are designed to prepare students specifically for kindergarten expectations, helping ease the transition academically, socially, and behaviorally.
- A focus on early literacy, language, and math skills - A high-quality TK program improves students' academic skills in these areas compared to their peers who did not attend TK.
- Attention to social-emotional development - Students who attend TK are significantly more engaged in class than students who did not attend TK and exhibit more self-control. Student engagement is critical for academic achievement, as engaged students pay attention, participate actively, and have positive learning experiences.

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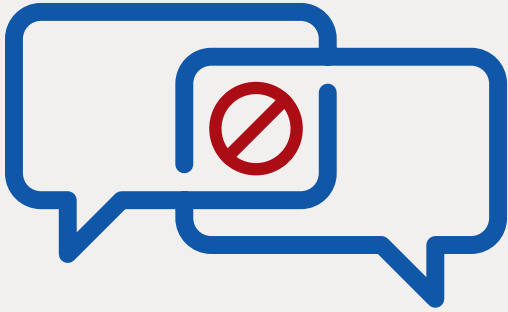
IV. Demographic Profile of PON's Focus Group Participants

The focus group participants who shared their experiences, concerns, and suggestions to guide our TK findings represent a cohort of 40 parents whose children attend pre-kindergarten through kindergarten classes:

- 100% of participants identified as Latino or Hispanic.
- Most were women and mothers (39 of 40), including one grandmother.
- Have children who attend six different Los Angeles County school districts; Hacienda La Puente Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, Los Angeles Unified School District, Lynwood Unified School District, Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District, and Pomona Unified School District. One participant has children who attend Victorville Elementary School District in San Bernardino County.
- A large majority of parents have more than 1 child, with an average of almost 3 children per household.
- Fourteen parents have a child in a transitional kindergarten program or have had their child in a transitional kindergarten class in the previous school year.
- Fourteen parents have a child in a preschool program and are considering or would consider enrolling their child in a transitional kindergarten program in the next school year.
- Twelve have a child who was either age ineligible for TK or chose not to enroll in a TK program.
- A majority of participants whose children are currently enrolled in preschool attend a state and/or federally-subsidized child development program, namely Head Start.

V. Our Findings

During the Spring of 2023, PON convened five parent focus groups to engage in a dialogue concerning their experiences and concerns with their child's preschool, and suggestions on how to improve TK schooling. Three major themes emerged from these discussions, supported by first-hand accounts shared by the focus group participants.



Theme 1:

LACK OF OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION

Premise: Before the 2022–2023 school year, during which the first phase of TK implementation began, California predicted 120,000 students would enroll in TK.

Reality: Actual enrollment numbers were almost 20 percent lower than projected, resulting in just 52% of age-eligible children enrolling in TK. Parent feedback strongly supported the idea that a substantial portion of that enrollment gap was due to a lack of outreach and communication from important stakeholders, including local school districts, their current preschool providers, and community-based groups.

A. The Value and Benefits of a High-Quality Transitional Kindergarten Program

As noted earlier, research supports the short and long-term benefits of a high-quality transitional kindergarten program but that message wasn't delivered to parents.

Challenges Faced by Parents

- Parents were largely unaware of short and long-term benefits and cited little effort by stakeholders to communicate this information to them.
- Parents noted they had received little to no TK information concerning its availability in general, the enrollment process, school site options, and the importance of high-quality TK instruction.
- Some parents noted that to the extent they did receive information, it was rarely provided in their native language.

"I believe it is important for them (educators) to explain to parents what TK is. In my case, I didn't know what it was about, and I didn't know what it did, so if I had known more, if they had explained it to me before sending my child, I would have seen the benefit of TK. I asked myself, how could I send him (to school) for so much time? But if they had explained the benefits, that would have helped a great deal."

-Sandra (Los Angeles USD)

Parent Recommendations

- Host a cheerful and interactive TK fair at school for parents and their children to attend, learn and get resources.

"I would like the school to hold a meeting, allow us to see the classroom where they will be in, and tell us what they will be learning."

-Lorena (Los Angeles USD)

B. The TK Enrollment Process and Program Details

[Standard guidelines and expectations for TK enrollment](#) (first year of public schooling) include:

- Provide clear, accessible information about the enrollment process and timeline, program options, and requirements. Materials should be family-friendly and available in parents' primary languages.
- Host open houses, meet-and-greets, and information sessions for families to learn about the school, meet teachers, and ask questions. Offer some sessions in the evening or on weekends to accommodate work schedules.
- Have a welcoming school office with staff trained to answer parent questions knowledgeably and provide assistance in completing enrollment paperwork or online submissions.
- Assign new families a parent liaison or ambassador to guide them through the enrollment process and help connect them to resources. Provide contact information for ongoing questions.
- Proactively communicate with families about required paperwork, immunizations, transportation, and other key details so they can complete steps on time. Follow up individually if issues arise.
- Offer translation and interpretation services for families who aren't fluent English speakers. Provide enrollment materials in their primary language.
- Be understanding that the experience may be stressful or emotional for parents of young children. Offer reassurance and emphasize your partnership throughout the transition.
- After enrollment, maintain ongoing communication and opportunities for parent involvement to foster comfort and engagement with the new school.

Challenges Faced by Parents

- Parents who had enrolled their children in a TK program largely knew the details of their school district's TK enrollment process by :
 - Taking the initiative to go and inquire at the school;
 - Learning about it from friends, family, or community word-of-mouth; and
 - Participating in school committees where they received information or because they had older children already enrolled at the school.
- Parents cited not receiving any information as to whether or not their students were age-eligible for TK enrollment, what the process for TK enrollment was, if transportation would be provided, or if their school site offered a full-day schedule and/or wrap-around services.
- There were also notable differences between school districts and within schools in the same district on how they would inform parents of the program and process.

"It is very important to inform parents what TK is. When I went to enroll my son in kindergarten, I was told at school that because of his age, he had to enroll in TK. I didn't like it because this was going to delay him for a full year, and he would then graduate high school until he was 18. I asked for an explanation but all they could tell me was that this was due to his age."

-Violet (Pomona USD)

"For family reasons, we had to move to another city. I saw a huge difference (related to the welcoming environment, parent engagement, training, interest, quality of teaching, etc.) between the district I left with this new one."

- Patty (Victorville)

Parent Recommendations

- Build staff capacity to communicate TK information to parents. Start by providing training to staff at the main office tasked with assisting parents so they can provide basic information about the importance and impact of TK.
- Provide TK workshops, open houses, campus tours, or teacher/parent orientation meetings before the start of the school year. Parents want to see and get their children familiar and comfortable with the classrooms, bathrooms, playgrounds, cafeteria, meet the teachers, and know what children will learn during the year.
- Invest in a motivating and visible advertising campaign for TK in our community. Include information about what TK is, for what ages, enrollment time, which schools offer TK, and where to call or who to contact. Place the ads in areas visited by mothers: laundries, supermarkets, and bus stops.

"It is important to provide an informational orientation that includes a tour, so that parents and more importantly, the children feel (safe and) familiarized (with the school campus)... Just imagine a child leaving home for the first time without knowing any of this (the setting or school). For this reason there should be a transition and orientation during the first weeks of school so the child connects (to the new setting or routine) little by little, and the teacher can collaborate so they can help children become familiar, and so the day doesn't seem an eternity and to prevent them from crying and not wanting to go to school so they can better learn what they are taught academically." - Karla (Norwalk La Mirada USD)



C. Language Barrier

The following [requirements and guidelines have been established so California schools accommodate non-English speaking parents](#). The goal is to ensure limited English proficiency is not a barrier to meaningful parental engagement and equitable access to information. Schools are expected to be proactive and accommodating in this regard.

- Schools are required to provide full interpretation/translation services for parents during enrollment, parent-teacher conferences, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, and any other school-initiated activity. This includes providing interpreters and translating documents.
- For regularly scheduled important school events like open houses and report card nights, schools must give adequate notice to parents in their primary language about the availability of interpretation services.
- Written communications and documents such as report cards, notices, forms, and handbooks must be translated for parents who speak a primary language other than English if that language group exceeds 15% of students.
- Schools must have a process to identify languages spoken by students and parents to determine translation needs. Annual Home Language Surveys are commonly used.
- Schools are expected to make reasonable efforts to communicate with parents in a language they understand about school programs, policies, and activities.
- Bilingual staff should be utilized for interpretation and translation if available and qualified. Schools can also contract for these services.
- Confidentiality of students and parents must be maintained when providing translation services.

Challenges Faced by Parents

- Informational meetings or conferences with parents in schools are conducted in English and are rarely provided in the parent's language.
- When necessary, the school or district provides interpretation services. A key problem is interpretation in most cases is poor and inaccurate, so parents do not understand the convoluted message, or important information is lost in translation. Educators usually do not know this and trust the service provided by interpreters. This can be another factor that hinders parents' clear understanding of TK.

"There was only one information session provided for parents that we were made aware of. It was via Zoom and the presenters only spoke in English. There were no translation services provided.

- Alfonso (Pomona USD)

"The relationship and communication between parents and teachers is very important and in the language that parents speak, otherwise it is very difficult even with interpretation. My daughter's teacher makes this effort."

- Norma (Los Angeles USD)

Parent Recommendations

- Whenever possible, hire bilingual staff, especially teachers.
- When hosting meetings or especially in training for parents, conduct them in the language spoken by the parents.
- When contracting interpreters, evaluate the quality of their services and the accuracy of their interpretation or translation.

"It is difficult to communicate with a teacher who does not know or understand my language, and many times there is no one to translate for us and if there is interpretation it is not good, because I do not even understand in Spanish what the interpreter says."

- Patty (Victorville)



Best Practices to Improve Outreach and Communications

- Educators should inform parents that high-quality TK delivers developmental readiness, smooth transitions to kindergarten, academic and social-emotional growth, personalized instruction, long-term benefits, and parent engagement through an additional year focused on essential skill-building. Engaging parents and sharing student success stories emphasize TK's value.
- Districts can effectively explain TK enrollment by providing accessible bilingual information and support, hosting orientations, offering one-on-one guidance, collaborating with preschools, organizing site visits, community outreach, and timely communication.
- For Spanish-speaking parents, prioritize bilingual communication using translation services, establish in-person meetings to build trust, utilize visual aids and bilingual staff, create a welcoming environment, share community resources, listen actively, seek feedback, and collaborate.

"My son entered school with only Spanish and there they speak to him in both languages. I have seen in his class, when he speaks in Spanish, the teacher tells him, 'Now tell me in English'. There are words he does not know and she helps him to say them in both languages. I liked that because he feels safe and he likes it too."

- Lorena (Los Angeles USD)

"My son, who was in TK, has progressed a lot compared to my older daughter (who did not go to TK) because she has had a lot of difficulties...I feel that the children who didn't go to TK have not progressed enough."

- Clemecia (Los Angeles USD)

"The school sent me a flyer with my oldest son about Transitional Kindergarten, then I went to the school to ask about the whole process."

- Simona (Pomona USD)





Theme 2:

CLASSROOM & FACILITY CHALLENGES

Premise: [The legislation](#) that created TK, mandated there be one adult for every 12 TK students and no more than 20 students per credentialed teacher as well as age-appropriate classroom facilities and infrastructure.

Reality: Throughout our parent discussions, a recurring concern emerged concerning the classrooms themselves and the difficulties parents and their children faced when introducing their children to the public school system through the newly created TK grade. In addition to issues related to combined TK/K classrooms and inadequate staffing to comply with teacher-student ratios, parents expressed concern that the transition from preschool to TK was insensitive and not age-appropriate.

A. Student/Teacher Ratios

Across multiple school districts, parents we spoke with reported that, almost without exception, their child's classroom was not compliant with current student-teacher ratio requirements. The legislation that created TK mandated there be one adult for every 12 TK students and no more than 20 students per credentialed teacher. However, parents continually expressed concern the ratio was not in compliance with the law thereby preventing teachers and aides from adequately meeting the needs of each student. One parent noted her child attends TK with a morning cohort of 15 students. There are also 15 students in the PM cohort. However, for two hours each day, the classes overlap, and the teacher must somehow manage to teach all 30 students concurrently.

Challenges Faced by Parents

- Inadequate staffing, which results in:
 - A lack of emotional support for children, especially when the day is long; or
 - A lack of teacher patience and dedication and reliance on too many YouTube videos or games on the tablet instead of a focus on learning.
- Parents would like to volunteer to support teachers but volunteer processes are too regulated and cumbersome with many requirements, which some parents cannot fully meet.

"The teacher is overwhelmed with everything she has to cover with the children and has no assistant, and that leads her to neglect the children's socio-emotional and academic areas."

-Rossi (LAUSD)

Parent Recommendations

- Provide teachers with assistants so they can maintain the quality of the program throughout the day.
- Be more flexible and provide opportunities for parent volunteers. Parents can support the preparation of teaching materials, reading to children in small groups, and facilitating children's activities and games.
- Provide internship opportunities to university students in teacher prep or childcare provider programs.

B. Combined Classrooms

[Research has shown the benefits of TK diminish](#) when classes are combined and the goal of providing high-quality instruction is compromised. While this may be advantageous for districts facing staffing and infrastructure issues, parents were concerned their young child was not being taught in a developmentally appropriate manner because the teacher must accommodate the needs of the older children as well.

Challenges Faced by Parents

- Combining TK/K classrooms resulted in overcrowded classrooms.
- The interests, needs, abilities, and skills of children in TK and Kindergarten are different. The combined classroom is not an appropriate environment for teaching and learning for these children.
- If over two years, the same teacher performs the same activities with the two different age groups, they run the risk of negatively impacting children. Parents mentioned Kindergarten students getting bored by repeating the same activities and TK students experiencing fatigue and frustration given the advanced curriculum and strong academic pressure. In both scenarios, parents fear the experience limits or delays children's learning.
- Teachers have limited time to develop a personal relationship with each child, observe and evaluate their educational and socio-emotional development, and may miss any disability, developmental or learning delay.

"In my school, they have one classroom for children in TK and Kinder, with only one teacher. They spend two years with the same teacher. This causes a lot of pressure on TK children who have to keep up with Kindergarten children. And the teacher is focused on preparing the Kindergarten children who then go to first grade. TK children do not have the time to adjust to all the changes happening, and the transition is emotionally hard. It would be good for these TK children to have more play time, not so much pressure to perform academically, and to enjoy their childhood at that age."

-Loida (Los Angeles USD)

"I think it has been hard for my child because last year he was in TK and they were in the same classroom with kindergarten. I think the teacher focused more on the kindergarten children because they are going on to 1st grade, but in TK, they need more time dedicated to them. I don't like the idea that kindergarten is together with TK because they are too little to be together."

-Lorena (Los Angeles USD)

C. Classroom Infrastructure and Drop-Off/Pick-Up Procedures

[According to existing California regulations](#), each new TK classroom must be at least 1,350 square feet in size and have its own bathroom with appropriately sized toilets and extra-low sinks, among other requirements set down by the state.

Challenges Faced by Parents

- Combining TK/K classrooms resulted in overcrowded classrooms.
- Parents noted many of the TK classrooms are not appropriately configured for TK students or located on a part of the campus where students in older grades are centered.
- A recurring theme was the K-6 process of dropping students off was impersonal and not age appropriate for 4-year-olds who, at pre-school age, are accustomed to being walked into school by their parents and helped with their backpacks, etc. In short, parents were concerned their school was not sensitive to the difficulty TK students and their parents have in transitioning to a K-6 environment.

"I would love to see greener, more welcoming spaces.... Fewer computers, more games, and practice, more social interaction, more songs."

-Adrian (Los Angeles USD)

"It was really difficult with my son because he didn't want to go in and I had to go running after him and leave him crying...I felt like no one was helping."

- Paula (Los Angeles USD)



Best Practices to Improve Classroom & Facility Challenges

- The recommended student-teacher ratio for transitional kindergarten is 1:10 or 1:12 to allow for individualized attention, instruction, and progress monitoring. Smaller class sizes enable teachers to address unique developmental needs through differentiated learning and increased student engagement.
- Integrating TK and kindergarten requires communication, aligned curriculum, and supportive environments with collaboration, differentiation, parent involvement, and professional development.
- Best practices for TK classroom setup include welcoming, safe, age-appropriate spaces with flexible seating, learning zones, bilingual print-rich displays, technology integration, outdoor areas, visual supports, student work displays, and student input in decisions. Regular assessments and adaptations ensure the environment meets evolving needs.





Theme 3:

ABSENCE OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Premise: Family engagement training is mandatory for new credential PK-3 candidates and educators are required to implement family engagement practices and engage them in their child's learning process. Ongoing professional development is encouraged. Cultural awareness is emphasized.

Reality: In each focus group session, when asked what they would like their school to do to engage them in their child's learning, parents overwhelmingly stated they wanted more opportunities to meaningfully engage with teachers and other educators. When parent/home visits were mentioned, parents overwhelmingly wished their school would support teacher visits. In addition, parents conclusively expressed a desire to be included in the TK planning and implementation process.

A. Teacher-Parent Communication

Challenges Faced by Parents

- Parents frequently lamented the lack of timely and detailed communication they received from their TK teachers. Our discussion often pivoted to their concern that they were unaware of the curriculum goals or how their child was progressing in their developmental and/or learning milestones.
- Many parents expressed frustration that the little communication they did receive was perfunctory. Educators rely on one-way communication where only the teacher speaks and takes little to no time to listen to parents' questions, problems, or their children's challenges or needs.
- Parents say educators have no interest in communicating with parents because they believe parents don't have valid opinions or anything important to say or do when it comes to educating children. The parents' prior preschool experiences varied greatly but when they learned about the best practices in parent-teacher communication others had encountered, they expressed a strong desire to see those practices used in their child's classroom.

"We just had meetings, like a teacher conference, to see how our child was progressing, that was it."

- Sandra (Los Angeles USD)

"I would love an open house, workshops to get to know the activities, and teaching materials at home, we don't have any idea of what activities they will be doing."

- Adriana (Los Angeles USD)

I would like for the teachers to include us more, so that the children feel safe and trustful and it is not so hard for them to take that step (beginning TK)."

- Karina (Norwalk-La Mirada USD)

Parent Recommendations

- Communication strategies used in preschool settings (i.e., carving out time to listen, clarify information, and support parents) should continue in TK.
- Provide more opportunities to meaningfully engage with teachers and other educators: visit and observe the classroom during instructional time, read to the class, or assist with special events/days.
- Ask parents to keep a log of activities conducted at home related to reading, counting, coloring, physical activity, etc. For teachers to feel comfortable and at ease when parents ask, how did my child do? What did he/she eat? What did he/she do today?
- Establish with parents the best ways to communicate with them: online portals, email, phone, text messages, Zoom, or via writing. Regardless of which option(s) are selected, it is important to build trust, warmth, and empathy for each other.
- Help parents manage online portals, and teach them how to navigate the platform to find important information.
- Provide a monthly calendar with daily activities and content so parents can support learning at home.

“Workshops allow me to participate and learn about how to help my children. I feel more confident and have more tools to be involved and do better.”

-Lorena (Pomona USD)



Best Practice

The [best practices for family engagement in teacher-parent communication](#) for transitional kindergarteners involve creating an open and welcoming environment for parents. This includes maintaining regular communication channels, conducting parent-teacher conferences, encouraging two-way communication, promoting home-school collaboration, organizing parent education workshops, offering volunteer opportunities, celebrating achievements, providing accessibility and language support, and focusing on ongoing relationship building. These practices establish positive partnerships, effective collaboration, and active involvement, ensuring parents feel valued, informed, and empowered to contribute to their child’s education and development in transitional kindergarten.

B. Instruction Inclusive of Parents as Partners

Parents whose children participated in preschool have prior experiences related to what instruction looks like and how parents play an important role in helping their children be ready for kindergarten. This foundational knowledge allows them to compare instructional methods and family engagement.

Challenges Faced by Parents

Although there were some positive and encouraging comments, most parents expressed the following concerns:

- The teachers make the program very academic and rigid, without much freedom and forgetting they are interacting with still very young children.
- Reading activities are few and without much variation.
- There are few learning activities outside the classroom, or in the playground that engage students in using their senses of smell, touch, and taste.
- The lack of parent-teacher conferences focused on monitoring progress toward goals or milestones results in parents not knowing if their children are learning and how to support them at home.
- A lot of time is spent on computers, watching videos or playing games.
- Teachers need help developing a more creative and interactive program to make it less tedious when children must be there all day.

"The teacher is always very busy and stressed. I would like a closer relationship between her and me, to feel she is interested in my child's development. I want her to take me into account and trust her so I can tell her if I encounter any problems at home that could hinder my child's learning."

- Evangelina (Lynwood USD)

Parent Recommendations

- Ongoing professional development for teachers should be provided to improve instructional quality and make the curriculum more flexible so children can learn in an engaging and fun way. They need support planning and carrying out different methods, strategies, and activities according to children's ages and developmental stages.
- Teachers need formal training on how to engage families inside and outside the classroom, allowing parents to contribute their experiences, knowledge, and ideas in curriculum development, monitoring child development, creating a welcoming environment, and cultural and linguistic sensitivity. This could help teachers leverage parent volunteers to support program implementation.
- Learn the importance of supporting children's socio-emotional development, showing empathy, charisma, and warmth in relationships with children and their parents.
- Establish positive discipline techniques appropriate for young children.
- Learn stress management and self-regulation of emotions.
- Two-way and personal communication management
- Promote bilingualism, when possible.
- Use, maintain, and update parent portals and host parent-teacher conferences to evaluate and monitor children's learning.
- Conduct home visits to establish trust and a personal relationship with parents.



Best Practice in Action

"I love how the teacher teaches young children through play and singing, playing they learn the alphabet, numbers, colors, shapes, etc. Also how they carry out the routines of cleanliness and order after play, of food, and discipline. They read stories in English and Spanish and ask them questions and develop their fine motor skills: Coloring, playing with clay."

- Karina (LAUSD)

"We meet with my daughter's teacher once a month. We review the goals that we set ourselves the previous month, make changes, and raise the next month. It always takes our goals into account and helps us achieve them."

- Lety (Pomona USD)



C. Building Parent Capacity to Support Learning at Home

Parents expressed a strong desire to be able to reinforce classroom learning at home through consistent, clear communication from teachers, guided parent observations and accessible resources. Parents felt educators could provide more information to parents regarding what their children are learning on a daily basis, academic benchmarks, testing results, and school rules so families understand how to help their children succeed. Parents shared their personal experiences saying when schools provided the knowledge, tools, and opportunities for engagement, their children benefited from consistent academic support at home and school.

Challenges Faced by Parents

- Parents listed several topic areas where they or others would benefit from learning and these are listed in the recommendations.
- Lack of knowledge in child development and learning about parents' roles to monitor their child's developmental stages and milestones, and their educational progress. This includes emotional support or preparation for first-time parents struggling with separation anxiety.
- Schools or teachers rejecting parents' petitions to volunteer in the classroom.
- Other obstacles related to language, one-way communication, and racism were already addressed in other sections.

"Parents and children need emotional support to separate when the time comes, especially when their first born goes to school. If a parent learns to let their children go, it is easier for the child to let go as well, because children feel their mom's emotions. Also, let's not forget that the schedules are long, TK was more than 5 hours and if we are not prepared, it will affect children mentally and psychologically."

- Yareli (Hacienda La Puente USD)

Parent Recommendations

- Family tours to visit the school to meet the teacher, and walk the playground.
 - Training on the following topics:
- Child development and strategies to support their children to reach their developmental milestones and where to look for support if there are delays.
- Strategies to foster literacy and numeracy at home, and how to leverage their home language in learning.
- Attendance and its importance in school.
- How to support social-emotional development: sharing, taking turns, being kind, independence, solidarity, self-regulation of emotions, and resilience. Include how to leverage culture to foster a feeling of belonging and respect for our own and others' cultures.
- Learning how to navigate the TK-12th grade education system. This includes knowing how it is funded, the chain of command, and how to resolve questions, concerns, or problems. How to use online portals.

"The first time I dropped my son off at school, he cried a lot because he thought I was abandoning him. How can a child learn like that? Children need to learn that separating from their parents is okay and that they need to do their own activities without depending on the parents. They also need to learn to live with others in a healthy way, to be empathetic, social, and to explore, and regulate their emotions and feelings. Knowing this will help them learn more, for they will feel trust and safe."

- Faviola (Los Angeles USD)



Best Practice in Action

"[Schools should] allow us to participate, take us into account in the planning to contribute and express our experiences and ideas and that they put them into practice. They need to have more child-appropriate and eye-catching activities so that they learn in a fun way, so learning is simpler, more dynamic. There is pressure for them to learn letters and numbers, and yes, but in a fun way, so they would learn much faster than just doing it purely mechanically. And most importantly for them to not be too impacted by the change from home to school."

- Sandra (Los Angeles USD)

"As parents, we need to be well-informed and prepared to engage in the education of our children. If our children see we are engaged in their education, they are more eager and motivated, and happy. Districts could bring us workshops in language to help our children."

- Alice (Norwalk –La Mirada USD)

D. Culturally Sensitive Engagement

A number of parents shared that the limited amount of communication they did receive was rarely provided in their preferred native language. In addition, some parents expressed frustration that culturally relevant holidays or traditions were either not celebrated or limited to a brief classroom discussion. Educators often failed to ask for or provide the opportunity for parent input or assistance with these events. Some parents expressed frustration that when teachers did acknowledge a culturally relevant holiday or event but excluded parents, the significance of the celebration was mistakenly explained to students.



Parent Recommendations

- Celebrate everyone’s culture. This teaches empathy, respect, solidarity, tolerance, and responsibility and increases children’s knowledge about our society and world.
- Include families in these celebrations for two reasons: to provide knowledge and ideas about their culture’s celebrations and so they can learn about others’ cultures as well.

“Schools must support the work of tolerance and inclusiveness that parents teach at home, because we live in a country full of diversity! When schools celebrate the holidays of different cultures, it teaches children that there are other customs different from their own and we must learn to respect others’ cultures, and most importantly, to celebrate them with them.”

- Paloma (Hacienda La Puente USD)

“They do not prioritize fostering respect and valuing the different cultures and races of the people represented in the classroom. There is a certain racism observed in their facial expressions, which do not allow children and parents from other countries to feel included and welcome.”

-Maria (Los Angeles USD)

“They asked them to dress like someone from their culture, and he dressed as a charro, but his teacher told him – ‘Oh you are a cowboy!’ This made my child feel bad because he did not know how to explain that he was a charro, so I had to go explain (the difference).”

-Adriana (Los Angeles USD)

“On Cinco de Mayo, they say it’s the independence of Mexico, but I sent them a message that cleared things up for them. It’s important for them to have the correct information. We need to clarify the differences in our cultures.”

-Rosa (Los Angeles USD)



Best Practice

The best practices for educators to include parent input in the transitional kindergarten implementation process involve creating opportunities for collaboration, seeking and valuing parent perspectives, and incorporating their input into decision-making. This includes conducting surveys and feedback sessions, establishing parent advisory committees, organizing workshops and focus groups, scheduling parent-teacher meetings, encouraging classroom observations and volunteering, utilizing communication platforms, ensuring translation and language support, maintaining transparent decision-making, and fostering respect and appreciation for parent contributions. By implementing these practices, educators can actively engage parents, incorporate their valuable insights, and create a collaborative partnership that enhances the success and effectiveness of the transitional kindergarten program.

E. Parent Input in the TK Implementation Process:

The vast majority of parents conveyed they had little to no say in their school district's TK planning and implementation process. As noted above, the lack of outreach and communication in their native language resulted in parents being unaware they could and should have the opportunity to provide their thoughts and concerns during this process. As we explored this issue further, almost all parents volunteered that, had they been aware, they would have been more than willing to assist and provide input in this process. School districts are required to engage parents and community members in their [Local Control Accountability Plans](#) (LCAP) and budgets, and [TK expansion is included in these plans](#). School districts can meet this requirement through already-established parent committees, or they can form new ones to meet a specific population's needs.

Challenges Faced by Parents

There is no connection between preschools and K-12 school systems;

- There was little to no parent engagement. There is a need for more information, awareness, and encouragement from schools.
- Many parents work more than one job just to meet basic economic needs.
- There are several challenges with school committees including:
 - Lack of interpretation at meetings;
 - Being compliance-driven and valuing parents only as numbers on a sign-in sheet or wanting anyone (needing someone?) to sign documents, regardless of whether they understand the information;
 - Negative perceptions about school committees being a mechanism to waste time.

“The school must open up to suggestions from parents to improve the facilities and education of children ... and put them into practice! This would make parents feel really involved in their children’s education.

- Karla (Norwalk-La Mirada USD)

Parent Recommendations

- Strongly encourage parent participation in meetings;
- Listen to parent voices, experiences, and wisdom and consider their input in decisions and plans;
- Ensure the input received is representative of the students in schools



Best Practices to Improve Family Engagement

The best practices for educators to incorporate culturally sensitive family engagement in transitional kindergarten involve respecting diverse cultural backgrounds, promoting inclusivity, and tailoring communication and activities to meet the needs of all families. This includes using culturally responsive communication, building relationships based on trust and respect, providing cultural competence training, creating family cultural profiles, developing an inclusive curriculum, organizing parent engagement events, collaborating with community partners, demonstrating flexibility and understanding, actively listening to parent feedback, and celebrating diversity in the classroom. By implementing these practices, educators can create an inclusive and supportive environment where families from diverse cultural backgrounds feel valued, respected, and actively engaged in their child’s education.

I have had the opportunity to participate in LCAP meetings and it has been very rewarding for me to be able to give my opinion and support to the funds allocated to English Learners and Teacher Professional Development and Parent Training.

- Vero (Norwalk-La Mirada USD)

"The monthly [ELAC](#) and council meetings are different committees with different academic, economic, and regulatory approaches. [DELAC](#) has helped me a lot. You may not vote if you are not part of the committee, but you may be present, ask questions, or raise unresolved issues."

- Karina (Norwalk-La Mirada USD)

VI. Conclusion

Our findings highlight significant challenges and shortcomings in the implementation of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) in California. It's important to note the comments and perspectives included in this report come directly from the individuals who are most impacted by the efficacy of TK implementation – the parents of students who have been, currently are, or will be enrolled in TK programs. TK must work for them, but at this time, it is not. These findings underscore the urgent need for improvements to ensure a successful and effective UTK program that addresses these concerns and supports the academic success and well-being of all students. We must listen to and seriously consider these parent voices to put into action some very basic yet practical recommendations to improve TK. By implementing best practices in outreach and communication, addressing classroom challenges, and promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity, California can leverage the implementation of universal transitional kindergarten toward closing the achievement gap and providing equitable access to high-quality education for all students.



