



AB 1059: Financial Aid Opportunities for Preschool and Child Care Educators

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SUMMARY:

Assembly Bill 1059 will expand funding for existing professional development programs and create new financial incentives for college attendance to attract and retain teachers to the early care and education field. This expansion will focus on low-performing school areas in an effort to decrease the achievement gap in the earliest grades.

BACKGROUND:

Good reading skills are the foundation for all future learning. The best time to build this foundation is before kindergarten, and it requires expert teachers. Public leaders – from Liz Hill, California Legislative Analyst, to Ben S. Bernanke, Federal Reserve Chairman – have recently acknowledged the importance of the early childhood years to a child's later success in school and life. Likewise, RAND Corporation has conducted analyses that show increased investments in early childhood programs could result in numerous benefits to the state, including increased educational attainment and lower rates of social problems. The Legislature and Governor have already begun to respond to these calls for action. Last year, the State enacted AB 172 (Chan), which adds \$50 million to the FY06-07 budget for the expansion of preschool programs in areas with low school performance.

Over 100,000 low-income and at-risk children participate each year in the State Preschool Program and many thousands more attend other state-contracted child development programs. Developing the early learning skills children need requires deliberate, expertly planned lessons that are carefully executed by well-trained, creative professionals. Yet data shows that staff wages in the early care and education field are low, and turnover is high. According to the 2006 UC Berkeley California Early Care and Education Workforce study:

- the average highest salary for teachers working with preschoolers with B.A. degree is \$34,000 or \$16,000 less than the average California public kindergarten teacher,
- the average wage for highest paid assistant teachers working with preschoolers ranges from \$9 to \$11 per hour, and
- the average annual teacher turnover is 22% or twice that of public K-12 teachers.

These trends undermine the quality of these programs, and the educational experiences of the children who are enrolled.

Grant and stipend support programs have been developed to address these problems, but are underfunded and unable to meet the demand. Through the **Child Development Grant Program**, the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) awards grants, in exchange for a service commitment, to students who are pursuing a permit to work in the child care and development field. Created in 2000, the **AB 212 (Aroner) Program** enables Local Child Care Planning Councils to award retention stipends for staff working in state-contracted child care and development programs. These programs have had positive effects on the child care and development field, but more help is needed.

PROPOSAL:

1. Create a **Preschool Assumption Program of Loans for Education (P-APPLE)**, to help preschool workers at publicly-funded preschools repay their outstanding student loans.
2. Expand the **Child Development Grant Program** to provide 100 new grants and increases the annual award amounts to \$2,000 for 2-year institutions and \$3,000 for 4-year institutions.
3. Increase funding for the **AB 212/Aroner Program**, which provides retention stipends for ECE staff working at state subsidized child development programs.

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