
AB 571: Expanding Effective Preschool

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SUMMARY

AB 571 will require the state to offer voluntary, effective preschool to all low-income three- and four-year-olds, with a priority on four-year-olds, by 2011-12. The bill also requires that state-funded preschools provide a number of important components of an effective preschool program.

BACKGROUND

Numerous studies have confirmed the social and economic benefits of early education for individual children and their families, as well as society. Children who attend effective preschool programs, especially low-income and English Language Learners:

- Are better prepared for kindergarten
- Have higher language and cognitive skills in the first years of elementary school.
- Are less likely to repeat a grade or drop and out school, and more likely to attend college.

Despite these important advantages, many California families do not have access to an effective preschool program or cannot afford one. In California three out of four publicly-funded preschools have waiting lists, and in many areas of the state the average cost of full-time, year- round preschool exceeds the annual tuition of the University of California.

There has been a recent expansion of state-funded preschool, however it has been limited in scope. Looking ahead, the Legislative Analyst's Office forecasts an increase in Prop 98 funding over the next five years, and recommends that a significant portion of that increase be invested in preschool for all low-income children.

AB 571

AB 571 will require the state to offer voluntary, effective preschool to all low-income three- and four-year-olds by 2011-12, with a priority given to four-year-olds.

In addition to increasing preschool access, the bill will require state-funded preschool programs to do the following:

- Align instruction, curriculum, and developmentally appropriate assessment with kindergarten and early elementary grades
- Utilize the California Department of Education's preschool learning foundations
- Provide well-trained teachers
- Include a developmentally appropriate assessment system
- Integrate with full-day care
- Foster parent involvement and family literacy
- Connect families to other important services like health and nutrition

AB 571 also requires that a professional development system is in place to ensure that early education teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills to be effective. This system would include:

- Educational and financial support for teachers
- Institutions of higher education that are prepared to train early educators
- Development of teacher competencies for early educators

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