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Editorial: State must give pre-schoolers a chance

The education system in California has taken its share of criticism in many areas, with the number of under-achieving students and dropouts increasing each year. However, a recent report may have uncovered a root to a problem for many children that tends to begin even before they enter kindergarten.

According to a report released by the RAND California Preschool Study, low-income and minority children could benefit most from quality preschools yet they are the least likely to be enrolled in good early development programs.

Through a series of interviews with parents of 3- and 4-year-olds, hundreds of state providers along with the observation of 250 child care and preschool centers, researchers discovered that just under half of 3- and 4-year-olds in economically disadvantaged families are in preschool programs of any quality, compared to 70 percent of children whose families are better off.

Overall, an estimated 59 percent of preschool-age children in California are receiving some sort of formal early education, and given the trend, educators should be concerned because this means a significant percentage of kids entering school will do so without any preparation, thus, the achievement gap rises, which can eventually lead to a dropout problem.

But it's clear why this is happening. Many of these parents simply cannot afford quality preschool education. They are barely making ends meet, and the overall economic climate is only compounding the problem. We believe parents want the best education for their children, yet often that comes with a high price.

The solution is clear. The study shows our state lawmakers have a golden opportunity to make a great future investment in our children, and create a bill that can help low-income families with funding for quality preschool education. Funds can be channeled through the county preschools, or even private facilities — the choice should be up to the parents who would qualify.

This is a winning situation all around. Struggling parents can get some financial relief and be assured that their children will be better prepared for school; the kids will benefit in the long run from being educated at an early age, and our state benefits for developing better citizens and future leaders while producing fewer dropouts and putting less strain on our economy.

There are many programs out there that help low-income and minority families; we can't see a better cause than a child's education.