



California Has Historic Opportunity to Make This a Big Year for Little Kids

By Joanne Leavitt, Program Director for Early Childhood Education for the League of Women Voters of California (LWVC)

The state Legislature made history last week by proposing major investments in high-quality early learning for low-income children in California from birth to age 5, and the League of Women Voters knows that is a historic opportunity to have a profound impact on the future of California. With more than 100,000 children cut from early childhood learning opportunities in recent years, now is the time to make a big difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of California children and families.

In California, the League has also prioritized the financing of education from early childhood through high school as well as maintaining the educational content and quality of all early childhood programs as key issues.

High-quality early learning opportunities can have an incredible impact on children from lower-income families. Low-income children hear, on average, 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers, and when children are just two years old, there's already a six-month gap in language proficiency between lower- and higher-income children. Sadly, those who start behind often stay behind. Improving the quality and availability of early learning for the children who need it most will help tackle the readiness gap that many children face on the day they start kindergarten, and will ensure a brighter future for students, their families, and for California as a whole.

Sadly, there is a lot of unmet need. California only serves half of eligible preschool-aged children in either State Preschool or Head Start, and just 6% of the state's most vulnerable infants and toddlers receive the high-quality care and support they need to thrive. Without access to these programs, not only are many children not given a fair start, but their working parents are also left without childcare.

Members of the League feel strongly that when advocating for children we must recognize the critical needs of families and consider the long-term consequences of not addressing these needs. Research shows that making a wise and prudent investment in quality in early learning is the only way to ensure significant gains in student achievement and earn a high return on investment. Every \$1 invested in early learning yields \$7 in the form of lower grade retention, crime rates, and special education placement, as well as higher graduation rates and lifetime earnings.

What makes these proposals by the Senate and Assembly budget subcommittees all the more exciting is that they build on progress already underway with the new school funding formula called Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The League of Women Voters of California has long supported a less complex, more transparent system of public education funding that directs additional resources towards students who stand to significantly benefit from additional funding: low-income students, students of color, dual language learners and foster youth.

We applaud Governor Brown's leadership on LCFF and his vision of equality in education. By investing in early learning, we can fulfill the promise of LCFF by tackling the opportunity gap before it starts. This will ensure equitable education for our youngest learners, regardless of their family's income.

From the national commitment to early learning from President Obama and Congress, to the polls that show strong support for high-quality preschool and investment in these programs, support for early learning is increasing daily. We urge Governor Brown and the Legislature to put our children first in the final budget. This is the year we can make a huge difference in California's future.

League of Women Voters of California • 1107 9th Street, Suite 300 • Sacramento, CA 95814

lwvc.org • cavotes.org • smartvoter.org • easyvoter.org

916 442.7215 • 888 870.8683 • 916 442.7362 fax