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Preliminary Principles of Support for Pre-School For All

Endorsed by the Alameda County Child Care Planning Council

January 30, 2004

Background

These principles were approved by consensus of the Alameda County First Five Commission on September 25, 2003. They were developed with input from the Commission’s Program Committee, 40 community participants, and Commission staff. The principles are included here in their entirety, with two additions made by the Planning Council’s Early Care and Education Committee designated with an asterisk.

Principles

The Alameda County Child Care Planning Council fully supports a high quality early care and education system, accessible and equitably delivered for all children 0 to 5, regardless of family income or status. In addressing the emerging Pre-School For All (PFA) movement, which limits resources to a specific service delivery model and to three and four year olds only, the Planning Council accepts its responsibility to seek input from the families and community and give voice to their views.

With great respect and appreciation of the work being accomplished by the legislature, First 5 California, and organizations and individuals developing PFA proposals, the Alameda County Child Care Planning Council submits the principles listed below as essential for its support for development of a PFA program.

1. Pre-School For All must be developed within the context and goal of “early education for all children,” including infants, toddlers, pre-school, and school age children. PFA must be seen as one step toward a universal system of early care and education that provides the highest quality of services for all families and children.
2. PFA must **enhance**, not negate or reduce existing funding and program structures for all children 0 through 5, and must be built on the positive and successful services currently in place. The program must serve as a vehicle to improve upon the existing ECE structures so as to create a truly equitable and universally accessible system. Analyzing best practice models for replication and adaptation to a larger service focus is important in order to prevent confusion, divisive reactions, and exclusivity in program development.

*The Planning Council is particularly concerned about potential unintended effects of PFA efforts on the existing early care and education workforce. Teachers who may face higher educational requirements as a result of an expanded preschool system need adequate time, support and access to pursue professional development.

Note: Confusion often arises around terminology when addressing the issue of Pre-School. For example, “Child Care” is often interpreted (quite incorrectly in many instances) as a custodial service, assisting poor parents with the means to work; “Pre-School” is usually interpreted as an educationally oriented part day program for three and four year olds from middle class families. The reality of our current family and social structure requires a **Early Care and Education (ECE)** system that provide high quality, developmentally appropriate programs for children **and** support services for working families. See principle # 5.

*The Planning Council also emphasizes that in order to have a universal and equitable access, the development of Preschool For All must, from the beginning, address the needs of all preschool age children regardless of family income or special needs status.

3. The PFA program must address the current bifurcation of ECE funding and regulatory structures by promulgating a streamlined system that improves all ECE services. Presently, California administers a two-tiered ECE delivery system, one regulated by Community Care Licensing (Title 22) that provides basic health and safety protection for children in ECE. The other is regulated by Title V of the State Education Code and requires state subsidized ECE centers to comply with program standards that promote higher quality care and education. Title V standards include better child-teacher ratios, smaller group size, higher teacher qualifications, a planned curriculum, child observation (not standardized testing), appropriate referrals and support services for families, and parent participation. Further, Head Start has an additional set of standards that it must follow. Adding a fourth funding and regulatory system for PFA is unfair to families and children, would create an even more cumbersome service delivery system and undermine efforts to build an equitable system for all families.
4. The program must avoid further perpetuation of the artificial distinction between “education” and “care”. This is especially important as the interdependence of care, social and intellectual development, and school learning is so well documented. For young children, “learning” is not relegated to a three hour segment while performing specific activities. It takes place all day long and is impacted by every relationship and every experience. While a quality ECE program will emphasize different aspects of child development at different times (cognitively designed activities, music, free play, etc.) the quality of adult-child interaction and program structure is just as important at lunch and nap time as it is during circle time. The program must also ensure that the educational aspect of PFA is not simply a “watered down kindergarten curriculum”, but is research based and designed specifically for pre-school age children.
5. PFA must ensure *developmentally appropriate educational* services for children integrated with appropriate comprehensive *support services for families*, including those who need full day, full year ECE. In addition to the characteristics of quality education briefly described in #4, PFA programs need to include the supports that families require for maintaining a healthy family life, economic sustainability, and to prepare their children for school. These include an adequate supply of high quality and variety of ECE settings (part day, full day, pedagogically sound and focused on the social-emotional needs of children, sensitive to parent needs, culturally and linguistically appropriate, able to access professional and community services, etc.). One of the most important supports for children **and** parents *is continuity of quality programming and standards, without disruption of the child’s day or tenure in the ECE setting.*
6. Preparation and planning for a new PFA system must:
 - Include development and dissemination of clear definitions of proposed models, including explanations of “pre-school day,” “wrap around services,” program standards, administrative structure, funding streams and resources, etc.
 - Prepare and publish realistic cost projections that include the full range of infrastructure needs, on-going operational costs for an expanded system, workforce compensation commensurate with the K-12 system, and demographic growth over the next 20 years.
 - Ensure that funding resources are planned, identified, and reserved to cover projected costs before launch of PFA. Funding for PFA may not encroach on current ECE publicly resourced programs

- Solicit and incorporate input from parents who are current, past, or future consumers of ECE services, and who represent a comprehensive range of cultural, ethnic, and economic groups, and who have children with special needs. Intensive focus groups and surveys that include clear explanations and definitions of ECE models, including the proposed PFA programs, should be held throughout the state. Data from focus groups, telephone surveys, on-line questionnaires, and other methodology should be collected, compiled, and analyzed before any particular PFA program models are targeted for development.
- Include significant input from school districts, teacher preparation institutions, community based and government family agencies, and representatives from all early care and education (including family child care). Again, evaluating existing program models to determine best practices, “what works”, and what to replicate is of the greatest importance to building a successful PFA program.
- Implement a major review of the infrastructure required to address the comprehensive needs of children and families: this includes, but is not limited to, workforce and facility capacity, financing resources, and best practices in ECE.
- Develop an analysis of “gaps” in the infrastructure and cost estimates to build the resources necessary to meet the needs. This should include input from post secondary and financial institutions, and a developed timeline for implementation of the infrastructure.
- Provide particular attention to assessment of the cultural and linguistic needs of children and families to be served, with an emphasis on the changing demographics of our state. A goal should be to build a comfortable program that welcomes all groups, respects cultural preferences in providing care for young children, and provides resources for school readiness that complement the cultural norms.
- Include a comprehensive assessment of how to best serve children with special needs and the capacity needed to serve them
- Prepare a thorough analysis of possible “unintended consequences” of PFA on such areas as the ECE workforce, parents, existing ECE system, public schools, post secondary institutions, community training and family agencies, and public policy development.
- Incorporate a comprehensive program and process evaluation plan for the initial or demonstration programs, including impact on children, families, workforce, public schools, community, and the ECE and family support systems.