



# Education Program

*Strategic Plan Narrative*

*December 2018*

## Education Program – Strategic Plan Narrative

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than a decade, the Heising-Simons Foundation has invested in early childhood education, in recognition of the critical role the early years of life play in establishing a strong foundation for future success. Yet for millions of children, particularly those who are living in poverty and children of color, access to high-quality learning opportunities is limited or nonexistent. Working to overcome the systemic and other barriers that have impeded progress is at the core of the strategy described below.

### *Process*

The Education team started by interviewing many diverse external stakeholders to gather their views and counsel on the biggest problems to solve in early care and education<sup>1</sup> (EC&E) and the highest-impact roles available to philanthropy. We reviewed a comprehensive set of the Foundation’s Education grants using a common set of criteria. We commissioned the Foundation Center to develop a curated dataset of early care and education philanthropic activity across the nation yielding maps intended to help us and others determine where our philanthropy could be complementary to the work of other organizations and where it might be distinctive.

We then distilled lessons learned from our past several years of grantmaking in education, noting challenges in raising child outcomes at material scale. The Education program staff used these lessons to inform core shifts in our strategy, to establish specific outcome goals, and to focus and deepen our areas of investment. Most importantly, we affirmed our belief in the centrality of high-quality adult-child interactions and supportive, high-quality learning environments for children. In early May 2018, we shared our draft strategic plan with EC&E experts and philanthropic colleagues to gather their input and adjusted our strategy based upon this feedback. In June 2018, our Board approved our new strategy.

### *The Problem We Seek to Address*

Children from families with low incomes and children of color have inequitable access to high-quality educational opportunities and have lower educational outcomes than their peers. For example, just 24 percent of 4<sup>th</sup>-grade children living in poverty were assessed as proficient in math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2015 in the United States, compared with 58 percent of children from non-low-income families. Gaps start early and result in much lower rates of college completion and social mobility for children from families with low incomes and children of color. While we do not believe that our work—or even the whole education system—can by itself close such gaps, we do believe that philanthropy has a responsibility to do what it can to reduce these disparities.

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<sup>1</sup> Many terms are used in the field to describe the education and care of young children and their families. Please refer to section “Definition of Terms” below (pages 6-7), where we provide a definitional typology to describe how we define the early childhood developmental period, how we distinguish formal educational settings from informal settings, and how we describe aspects of the workforce that cares for and teaches young children. These terms are used throughout this document.

## *Goals*

We have identified ambitious child outcome goals to bring a disciplined focus on outcome improvement; to force us to identify what works, and what does not, at scale; and to identify opportunities to improve the lives of many more children.

- **Our long-term goal:** To facilitate the creation and strengthening of early childhood systems necessary for children from low-income families and children of color to reach their full potential by the year 2044, the year when the US becomes a majority-minority nation.
- **Our 10-year goal for California:** To improve educational proficiency rates for young children from low-income families and children of color by 10 percentage points<sup>2</sup> over the next 10 years.
- **Our 10-year goal for national work:** To develop coherent early childhood education systems in 5 to 7 states over the next 10 years that will enable children from families with low incomes and children of color to reach their full potential.

## *Approach*

Our strategy spans birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and recognizes that early learning happens in many settings, some within the formal education system and some outside of it—most notably, within the family context. Our work straddles the silos that exist within the birth-to-3<sup>rd</sup> grade policy and practice space to create a more coherent system that better serves children and families, particularly those of color and with low incomes. We will maintain a national focus, with a strong emphasis on our home state of California.

We intend to organize our work in two complementary portfolios:

- **Enabling Conditions**, where we focus on creating the systemic conditions that best enable high-quality adult-child interactions and positive learning environments, both nationally and in California; and,
- **Effective Practice**, where we focus on supporting effective practices that enable high-quality adult-child interactions within the systems and settings in which children from low-income families and children of color develop and learn.

Each portfolio will house a set of major initiatives. Each major initiative is a multi-year, multi-grant sub-portfolio designed to make significant progress toward our goals. Within the Enabling Conditions portfolio, we will work on a common set of challenges nationally and in California, although the starting point for each will be tailored to readiness conditions either within California or in states across the country.

We expect to define three or four major initiatives in each of the two portfolios over the next few years.

To date, we have defined three major initiatives, two within Enabling Conditions and one within Effective Practice.

- **Enabling Conditions (national): Stabilizing the Early Childhood Education Workforce** to ensure that all professionals in the workforce have the knowledge, skills, and

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<sup>2</sup> We would measure this using data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (4<sup>th</sup> grade)

institutional supports needed to effectively foster young children’s growth and development. This includes compensation on par with ECE teachers’ K-12 counterparts.

- **Enabling Conditions (California): Ensuring Accountability through a Data for Action Framework in California** to enable public agencies in California to meet the needs of young children and families by using high-quality integrated data to guide continuous improvement and inform planning, policy, practice, and operations to ultimately create an integrated system of services for young children.
- **Effective Practice: Creating Coherent Early Math Instruction in California from School Entry to Third Grade** to ensure that children, especially children from families with low incomes and children of color, are appropriately challenged and supported in math instruction to be proficient in math by 4<sup>th</sup> grade entry.

In addition to these three initial major initiatives, we envision future work in the Enabling Conditions portfolio that will bolster the capacity of state agencies to engage in functional governance of the early childhood education system (nationally, and in California when conditions are right). In the Effective Practice portfolio, we will explore major initiatives around family engagement in math; family engagement generally; dual language learners; and meeting the needs of children furthest from opportunity.

### ***Measuring Progress***

Attaining our goals will require a high degree of learning and adaptation, and we have developed an annual process to guide our work. Each major initiative includes a clear learning agenda and measurable milestones for the next several years. Our new annual performance monitoring and management process will track progress relative to these milestones using initiative-specific data and will drive annual revisions to our major initiatives, as warranted. We also will track summative measures, such as results from the NAEP assessment and from third-party assessments of improvement in critical elements of state governance systems to track progress on our overall strategy.

## II. INTRODUCTION

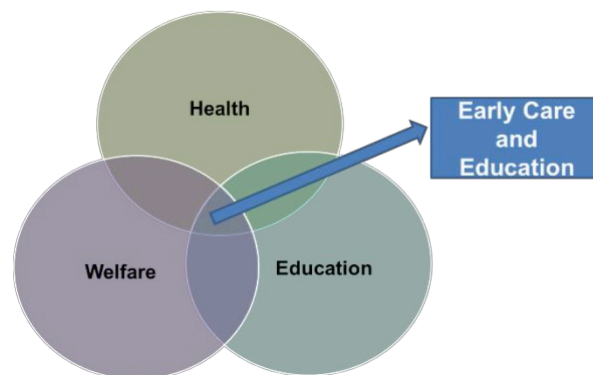
Since the inception of the Foundation’s Education program we have focused much of our grantmaking on areas that have been overlooked by other private and public funders. Our program’s grantmaking has spanned the transition to kindergarten, family engagement and support, early math education, dual language learners, building the evidence base on effective early childhood education programs, advocacy, and capacity building of organizations and the workforce—all aimed at preparing the next generation for school, work, and life.

The strategy described in this plan is an evolution of the prior strategy, guided by ambitious goals and built on lessons learned from earlier grantmaking, as well as momentum in the field. At its core, the strategy has been animated by the objective of achieving educational equity at scale.

### Definition of Terms

#### *Early Childhood Terms*

- **Early Childhood:** We use the term “early childhood” to refer to the developmental period when children’s growth, development, and learning is the most rapid and profound. This period occurs from birth through age eight.
- **Early Care and Education:** We use “early care and education” (EC&E) to refer to the field at large, that serves children birth to age eight. This encompasses several segments of the population that care for, educate, and otherwise support young children and their families. These include, but are not limited to, formal and informal care and education providers, teachers, home visitors, health and mental health professionals, coaches, mentors, advocates, researchers, and policymakers who focus on young children and their families as a target population.



- **Early Childhood Education:** We use the term “early childhood education” (ECE) to refer to formal educational settings and the policies and systems that undergird them. ECE settings are one segment of the broader EC&E field and include direct service programs such as regulated child care centers, regulated family child care homes, Head Start, and publicly-funded prekindergarten.

- **Early Childhood Education Workforce:** We use the term “early childhood education workforce” (ECE workforce) to refer to the teaching workforce that will be the focus of our major initiatives that attend to workforce stabilization. These efforts focus on the teachers and leaders working in classroom/program settings in the ECE segment of the field.
- **Early Childhood Policy:** We use the term “early childhood policy” (ECP) to refer to the policy field and the individuals in the EC&E field, broadly, who focus on systems-building, policy, and policy advocacy related to education and care, as well as the health and mental health of young children birth to age 8.
- **Informal Learning Settings:** We define “informal learning settings” broadly, including: museums; libraries; family, friend, and neighbor care; public assistance programs; after-school care; summer learning programs; and other community-based settings in which children learn, outside of school classrooms.
- **Professional Development:** We define “professional development” (PD) as the ongoing training and education in which the current ECE workforce participates (e.g. coaching, mentoring).
- **Professional Preparation:** We define “professional preparation” as the formal education and training in which individuals participate prior to entering into the workforce (e.g. degree-programs, clinical experiences).

#### *Other Terms*

- **Families with Low Incomes:** We define “families with low incomes” as those that earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). For children and families living in California, we further define “low income” as 70 percent of the State Median Income (SMI).

### **III. WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF OUR GRANTMAKING?**

Early care and education has been a critical element of the Foundation's work since its inception. In 2010, Board Chair Liz Simons created and launched the Stretch to Kindergarten program, a supplemental educational program that helps prepare children and their families for a successful transition to kindergarten. The program focuses on children from families with low incomes and employs high-quality practices to develop the core academic, social, and emotional competencies that children need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. This seminal program exemplified the power of high-quality interactions between adults and children in supportive learning environments for children's learning and school success, a focus that endures as a fundamental element of our new strategy.

The Foundation has long recognized the critical role that parents and families play in supporting a child's development. We have supported family engagement programs in the Bay Area and national advocacy efforts to increase funding for high-quality home visitation programs. More recently we have prioritized the systems and settings in which many children develop and learn, focusing on designing systems and services in a way that places families and young children at the center.

Increasing math competencies for young children has been a long-standing goal of the Education program. There is evidence of a strong link between early math competencies and a child's later academic proficiency, yet most philanthropic attention has been focused on early literacy, not early math. In response, our grantees have developed a rich research agenda in early math, resulting in, among other activities, the creation of the Development and Research in Early Math Education (DREME) Network. The DREME Network advances the field of early mathematics scholarship by conducting basic and applied research, by developing innovative tools that address high priority early math topics, and by building the educational research field of early math professionals. DREME's research, along with that of other grantees, has been critical to informing our new path forward in early math education.

For several years, we have invested significantly in policy (nationally, and in California). We have built the capacity of several leading organizations, and our grantees have led successful policy initiatives, including the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) in 2014 (the single largest federal funding stream targeted to young children living in poverty); a doubling of CCDBG funds; and the reauthorization of the Maternal, Infant, & Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) funding stream in 2018.

In addition, we made meaningful progress over the past year on the development of a strategy to support dual language learners in California. We plan to focus on approaches that support successful learning for populations of children and families who have traditionally been disenfranchised. This will continue to include lifting up the central role of family engagement by supporting partners who hold leadership role in the family engagement field.



#### IV. WHAT PROCESS DID WE USE TO DEVELOP THE PROPOSED STRATEGY?

In August 2017, the Education program initiated an intensive phase of information gathering, synthesis, and reflection. This included:

- **Stakeholder interviews:** The team interviewed a diverse group of more than 50 external stakeholders to gather their views and counsel on the biggest problems to solve in early childhood education and the highest-impact roles available to philanthropy. Responses to the first question included inadequate ECE financing, challenges facing the ECE workforce, and the lack of a coherent ECE system. Responses to the second question (not surprisingly) included addressing financing and workforce issues, as well as research.
- **Grants review:** We also conducted a comprehensive set of grant reviews, assessing the impact of each active or recently closed grant and the grantee's capacity to deliver the expected results. Overall, our grantees scored high on impact and grant performance. The grants review process also revealed that increasing the diversity of project staff may be an area in which grantees need targeted support.
- **Philanthropic landscape:** We commissioned the Foundation Center to develop a dataset of EC&E philanthropic activity across the nation yielding a set of maps intended to help us and others determine where our philanthropy could be complementary to the work of other organizations and where it might be distinctive. The Foundation Center also worked with the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute to examine the evidence base behind effective interventions.
- **Strategic planning:** In October 2017, we began a formal strategic planning process with the Bridgespan Group, a nationally-recognized nonprofit organization that supports mission-driven organizations, philanthropists, and funder collaboratives in early childhood education.
- **External reviews:** In early May 2018, we shared our draft strategic plan with a broad set of EC&E experts and philanthropic peers to gather their input.

## V. WHAT LESSONS WERE DISTILLED FROM OUR STRATEGIC REVIEW?

We learned a great deal from the strategic planning process and have distilled the most important implications for our future grantmaking into several lessons learned.

### *The challenges in achieving impact at scale*

- **The challenge of changing parent/caregiver actions:** Achieving sustained changes in parent/caregiver actions is extremely important, but often requires intensive interventions. Individual programs that achieve this level of change can be costly on a per family basis. One potential way to support families at scale is to increase the use of effective family engagement practices in large organizations and systems such as school districts, publicly-funded ECE systems, and community-based settings.
- **The challenge of translating evidence-based approaches into high-quality practice:** Grantmaking that attempts to scale evidence-based practices in programs and systems work takes time, resources, and commitment. As a result, we must recognize that adoption of best practices with fidelity requires prioritization of resources, attention to local needs and assets, and ample scaffolding for the adults working in the system to adapt their mindsets and practices.
- **The challenge of having significant impact on many children:** Our goal is to reach a large number of children, particularly the children with the greatest need. This can be achieved most cost effectively by working through the large publicly-funded ECE programs (e.g., Head Start, subsidized child care, state-funded prekindergarten) and services (e.g., home visiting) in which so many children develop and are educated. Two challenges exist to effectively supporting children and families via these programs/services. First, many families still do not have access to such programs/services. Second, many of existing programs and systems are not resourced adequately to provide the breadth or depth of high-quality adult-child interactions and positive learning environments required to achieve the outcomes we target. An alternative to focusing our grantmaking on specific program models or service-delivery settings is to change the existing systems of policy and practice in which these programs and services are situated – for the purposes of increasing the quality of and access to these programs and services. Investing in core elements of system improvement that impact adult-child interactions may be an attractive high-leverage area of focus for our future strategy.

### *Our readiness for shifts in our work*

- **Our readiness for deeper focus:** Upon establishing its Education program, the Foundation selected areas of focus that had been neglected by others. Since then, we have invested broadly in those areas to learn more about what it would take to change the outcomes of children. Based on what we have learned, we are now ready to invest in more focused ways for greater impact.
- **Learning from our research to inform our approach:** We have invested heavily in research, often guided by explicit learning questions. These investments allowed us to catalyze attention toward lesser known areas (e.g., foundational research in early math learning), create momentum toward identifying effective practices (e.g., evaluations of innovative approaches to family engagement), and establish our reputation and legacy in research. Going forward, we recognize the value of more formally distilling the lessons from our research and narrowing the scope of our research efforts to align with the goals of the Education program and the major initiatives.
- **The benefit of developing specific outcome goals:** To date we have not defined child outcome goals for our work, in part because establishing specific objectives felt premature for the field's historically overlooked areas. Going forward, we recognize that greater clarity on the child outcomes on which we are focused (which children, which age ranges, which outcomes, which places) will bring greater focus and impact to our strategy.

## VI. WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WE ARE TRYING TO SOLVE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

### 1. *The demographics of the U.S. are shifting rapidly and dramatically*

The demographic composition of the United States has changed significantly over the past few decades. These shifts are expected to continue, and by 2044 the United States is projected to become “majority-minority” (i.e., racial and/or ethnic minorities are a majority of the population). These national shifts have already arrived in some places, including our home state of California. And they are now manifest in certain age groups, starting with our youngest residents.

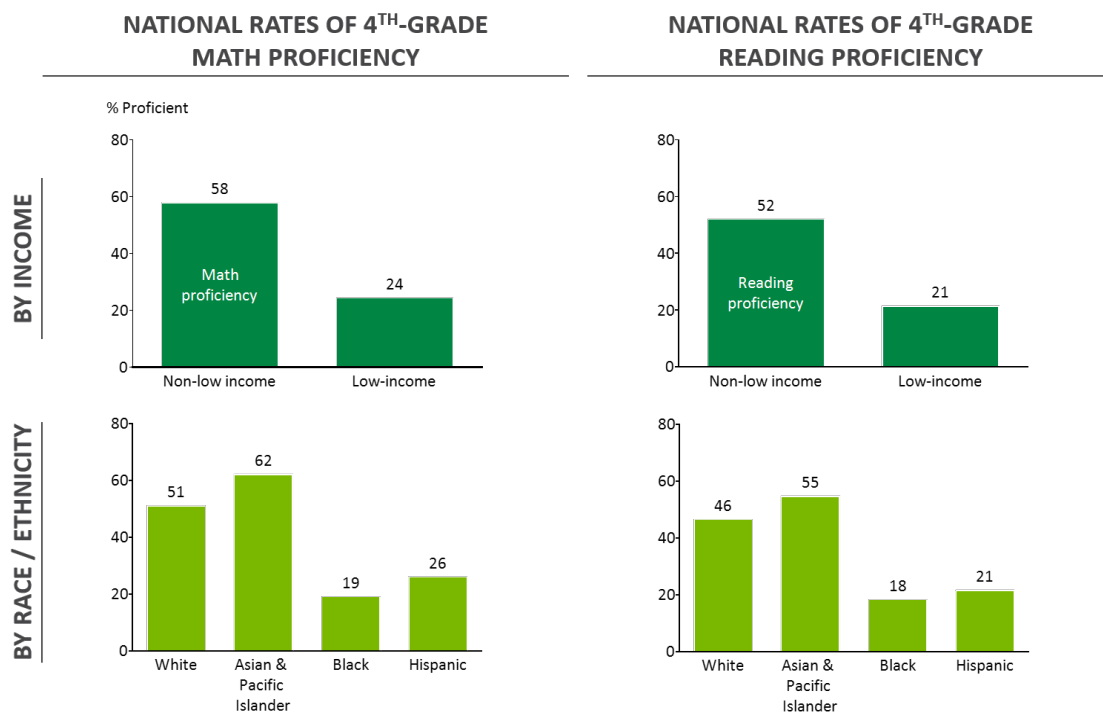
### 2. *Increased educational disparities*

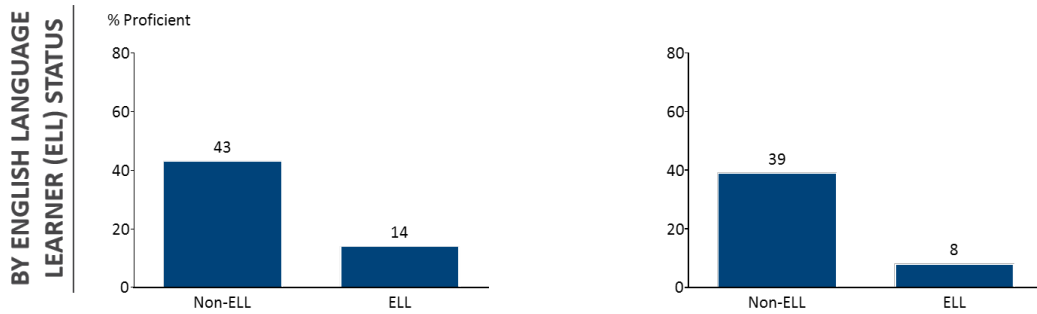
In our view (although this is contested by others), the changing demographics are not the problem. The problem is that these shifts have been accompanied by increased income inequality and growing social immobility tied to a set of structural and cultural barriers that have disenfranchised the very population that will become our future majority. Particularly in education, but across many other dimensions, the gaps as measured by race, ethnicity, and income are evident.

### 3. *The gaps start early*

By age 5, the age at which most children enter the formal K-12 education system, children from families with low incomes demonstrate lower rates of readiness for the academic, social, and emotional challenges of kindergarten. These differences show up much earlier and are observable in very young children (e.g., gaps in math-related skills can be discerned by 6-9 months).

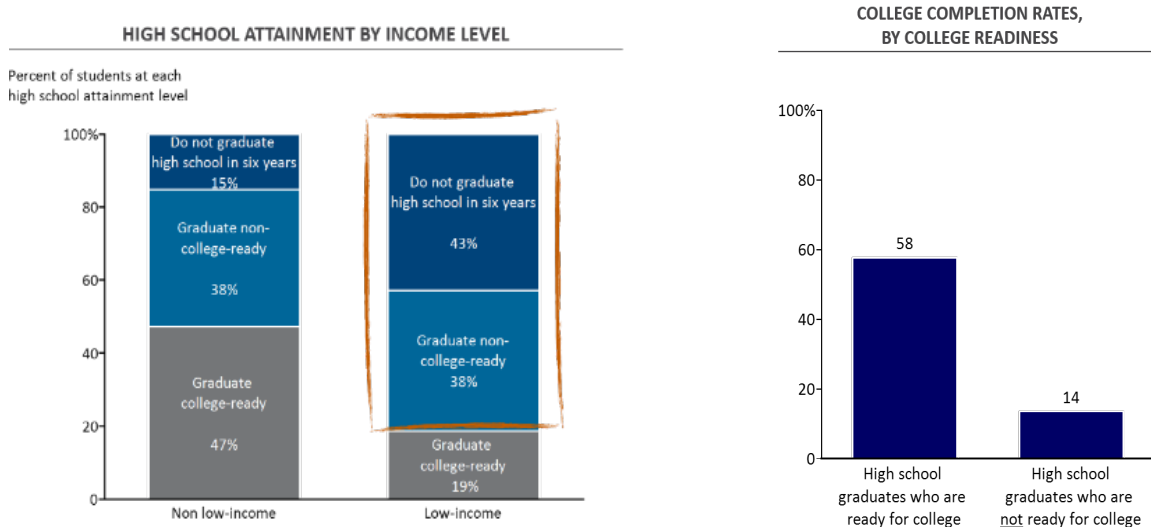
### 4. *These gaps persist as children progress through elementary education*





**Figure 1.** Children from low-income families, Hispanic and Black children, and English language learners are much less likely to be proficient in math or reading as measured by 4th grade test scores. (Credit: Bridgespan Group.)

**5. *And by the end of the high school years, students from low-income families suffer from much lower rates of college-readiness and college completion***



**Figure 2.** Only 19 percent of students from low-income families graduate high school ready for college, which means that they face daunting odds with college completion. (Credit: Bridgespan Group.)

The gaps in college completion are a primary contributor to the low rates of social mobility in the United States, particularly given the changes in the global economy and a labor market which call for higher and higher levels of education. Given the vital role that education could play to level the playing field and prepare children for the jobs and responsibilities they will inherit, it is important to work across the age spectrum to lift up the academic and social/emotional outcomes of the next generation.

## **6. *Brain development starts early and the return on investment is high***

Research on brain development and economic analyses highlight the importance of investing early in support of more frequent and durable high-quality adult-child interactions and supportive learning environments. Investment that starts early and that is effective in furthering brain development provides a robust platform for subsequent investments in education. Therefore, the earlier that such interactions and environments are influenced positively, the higher the return on investment for the child and for society.

For these reasons, there is a compelling case for societal investment in very young children (0-2 years). These very young children also can be the most difficult to reach (e.g., relative to older children, who often can be reached in larger numbers, for example through the K-12 system). The return-on-investment calculation for philanthropy includes both the impact per child (which the brain research suggests is very high for the youngest children) and the number of children reached. As a result, philanthropic investment needs to balance the trade-offs of working in larger, organized early childhood settings (such as childcare, pre-K or K-12) that generally reach children later versus smaller settings where very young children are (such as family, friends, and neighbor care) by evaluating the relative impact each will have on improving the lives of as many children as possible.

## **7. *The field faces many challenges***

Research clearly demonstrates the efficacy of, and return on investment from, supporting early child education. It has been challenging, however, to realize these benefits in a reliable manner and at significant scale.

There are a number of factors that we believe contribute to this challenge:

- First, the field is beset by a host of deeply rooted cultural beliefs that have impeded broad-based support for EC&E. Believing in the primacy of the family, policymakers and the public have yet to see EC&E as a public good, deserving of universal public investment. Instead, the history of public and political support for EC&E has been fragmented and episodic. The ECE workforce are seen as “babysitters” rather than teachers; much of the workforce is paid poverty wages.
- Second, the younger the child, the more difficult it can be to reach large numbers of children in a cost-effective manner while still ensuring program quality. While large groups of elementary school-aged children spend many hours together each day, and over a school year, the same cannot be true for younger children for a variety of reasons (e.g., the recommended child-to-teacher ratio for infants is 3 to 1, which is developmentally appropriate but costly). ECE settings are able to serve more preschool-aged children per classroom, but the dosage is often low (e.g., many programs only serve children for 3 hours per day). Furthermore, eligibility for and attendance in such settings is not universal in a majority of states and localities. The healthcare system provides near-universal access to children and families, and often medical providers can give parents advice on development and learning, but this setting is the subject of multiple objectives competing for scarce time. As a result, the means of reaching young children often is through programs and not through large institutional systems that reach large numbers of children.
- Third, there are a plethora of different programs, services, and funding streams that serve young children and their families. They typically have varying objectives and heritages, address only a piece of the overall puzzle, and lack the ability and incentives to coordinate. Such a lack of coherence is not only problematic for a child’s early learning and confusing for parents, but also suboptimal from both policy and practice perspectives.
- Fourth, there are no universal standards, assessments, or data systems to inform the quality of settings and services and their impact on child outcomes. Without such data and reliable measures, it is difficult to fully understand the challenges, let alone whether and which efforts to improve these settings and services are effective across the country.

- Fifth, the ECE workforce is highly unstable—due to low wages, low and inconsistent preparation requirements, and high turnover. This is especially problematic, given the recognized value of high-quality teacher-child interactions in producing positive learning and development outcomes for young children living in poverty.
- Sixth, the nature of work has changed, and many more employees are subject to non-standard work schedules, which make childcare difficult and causes stress for families.
- Finally, most areas of the ECE field suffer from insufficient funding to support the quality required to generate significant gains and to serve all children who would benefit.

## VII. WHAT GOALS GUIDE OUR FUTURE WORK, AND HOW WE WILL KNOW THAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED THEM?

We recommend a set of specific and ambitious goals: ambitious enough to force us to think about the reach and depth of our impact, but not so specific as to restrict our focus to narrow age ranges or particular settings and systems. These goals are too ambitious to be achieved alone. They will require partnership, patience, and risk-taking.

***Our long-term goal: “To facilitate the creation and strengthening of early childhood systems necessary for children from low-income families and children of color to reach their full potential by the year 2044, the year when the U.S. becomes a majority-minority nation.”***

Our long-term goal recognizes and seeks to amplify the assets inherent in all children as well as those unique to children from diverse backgrounds. This goal, much like the goals and initiatives that follow, is intended to establish an asset-based view of the people, communities, grantees, and systems with whom we hope to partner in pursuit of improved outcomes for children.

Our long-term goal is aspirational. It manifests the objective of equality of access to high-quality learning experiences, and of results, for all children, especially children from low-income families and children of color. We will know we have achieved it when our target population achieves the same proficiency levels as their peers. We recognize that we must work in tandem with other sectors to ameliorate societal inequities that otherwise could pose insurmountable obstacles.

To help us reach this long-term goal, we have 10-year goals both for California and nationally.

***Our 10-year goal for California: “To improve educational proficiency rates for children from low-income families and children of color by 10 percentage points over the next 10 years.”***

Our near-term goal for California is ambitious and implies significant and tangible progress in California specifically. Our California and national goals are informed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The NAEP measure is common across states, is consistent across time (unlike most state-level assessments) and meets a high standard by designating as “proficient” only those students who are on track to graduate from high school prepared for college and career success. The first year assessed by NAEP is the fourth grade, which comes at the end of our age range of focus.

Currently only 16 percent of California children from low-income families achieve proficiency in math and reading as measured by the NAEP, in contrast to about 50 percent of those who are non-low-income; only 14-18 percent of black and Hispanic students are proficient in the same topics, compared to nearly 50 percent of white students.

While the NAEP assessment is reliable and comparable over time and across states—and was designed to assess “on-track” trajectories for college- and career-readiness—we recognize two downsides. First, as a 4<sup>th</sup>-grade measure, it provides no direct information on progress for children before fourth grade. Second, it is an academic measure: it represents the cumulative effects from a number of factors including a quality learning environment and the development of social and emotional competencies, but it does not actually measure these critical factors.

As a result, while the NAEP assessments will provide a summative perspective on our progress toward our ambitious goals, we will look to interim measures to inform our grantmaking on the path to our 10-year and long-term goals. This might include, for example, the development and use of state or district assessments of proficiency in the K-3 years, assessment of progress on ratings of environmental conditions in early childhood systems, or measuring the impact of formative assessments for math learning on early math competencies.

We know that that our work or the education system writ large will not be sufficient to create 10-percentage-point gains in statewide outcomes by themselves and to overcome structural barriers. We do, however, believe that philanthropy can make meaningful contributions that enable the changes required to achieve educational equity. By aiming high, we are more likely to prioritize areas that have the greatest reach and depth of impact on adult-child interactions and learning environments.

The 10-percentage-point goal is ambitious, but we have been inspired by the performance of states such as Massachusetts and Tennessee over the past decade (from 2005 to 2015).

***Our 10-year goal for national work: “To develop coherent early childhood education systems in 5 to 7 states over the next 10 years that will enable children from low-income families and children of color to reach their full potential.”***

This goal recognizes the relationship between the objectives, design, and coherence of state early childhood education systems and the outcomes they generate for children—and our belief that this relationship is causal. We recommend a focus on four particular elements that are aligned with our capacities and most ripe for change:

- A functional approach to governance ensuring aligned and effective systems, programs, and funding streams, informed by outreach to, and engagement with, families.
- Adequate and effective financing mechanisms for high-quality programs and services.
- A prepared, diverse, and adequately-compensated workforce.
- Effective data and accountability mechanisms to inform performance and improvement.

Our first major initiative in this area is the ECE workforce. We plan to evaluate success for this initiative using the workforce index developed by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (Whitebook, McLean, Austin, 2016) (see indicative visual below). This index measures changes in policies related to the appropriate compensation and effective preparation of ECE teachers across settings (e.g., prekindergarten, child care) on a state-by-state basis. It uses a set of absolute measures related to minimum preparation and compensation to assess this progress. States are ranked as making progress (green), edging forward (yellow), or stalled/regressing (red) against these benchmarks.

Currently five states score as “making progress” on this measure. Our objective is for an additional 5-7 states to “make progress” (i.e., achieve a “green” rating) over the next several years.

We also intend to support research to develop measures that accurately assess the degree to which improvements in state systems result in at least a 10-percent increase in access to high-quality systems and services for all children. These would include indicators to track increases in access to high-quality ECE for children from low-income families and children of color.



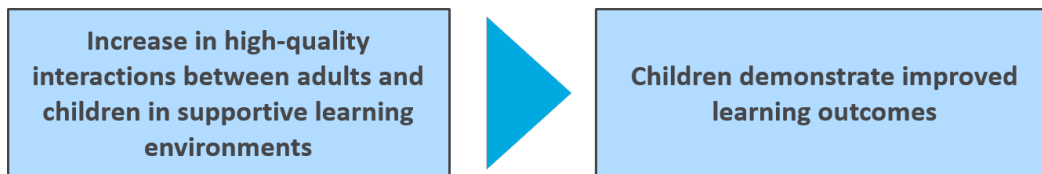
## VIII. WHAT VALUES AND BELIEFS GUIDE OUR STRATEGY?

### ***A grounding in equitable outcomes for children and families***

We believe that all children deserve the opportunity to develop to their full potential, and we also recognize that some children, in particular those who are from families with low incomes and children of color, face significant systemic and institutional barriers that impede their progress. We recommend a strategy that focuses on these children, and we intend to measure our progress based on the improvement in equitable outcomes along the birth-to-eight age spectrum.

### ***The centrality of high-quality adult-child relationships and supportive learning environments***

The research and evidence are clear—good learning outcomes in group settings require high-quality adult-child interactions, of sufficient duration, in supportive learning environments. Whether we are investing in a few families or a statewide prekindergarten system, if evidence-based thresholds for the nature and duration of adult-child interactions and the quality of learning environments are not present, our work is unlikely to achieve the impact we expect. Therefore, our strategy is focused on the identification and spread of approaches that improve the quality of adult-child interactions in formal and informal learning environments or that increase the reach or duration of existing high-quality interactions and environments.



*“The ‘active ingredient’ that promotes children’s positive development lies in the human relationships between adults and children; the scientific evidence behind this is strong, clear, and supported by a large consensus.”*

Junlei Li, Harvard Graduate School of Education

### ***A focus on root causes and durable long-term solutions***

Our interest in a systems level approach to early childhood care and education is based upon our understanding of the challenges inherent in the current patchwork and fragmented policy landscape of EC&E, and the difficulties in implementing large scale improvements without a coherent infrastructure. Many years of good work to develop specific interventions and solutions have foundered because of a lack of a robust and coherent systems. At the same time, gains from high-quality preschool interventions can be squandered if the K-12 system is not prepared to build on them; thus, there is work to be done in both the K-12 system and the 0-5 arena.

### ***The critical role of family engagement and family-centered systems***

Families play a critical role in the development of their children—in the home and as partners in the other settings and systems in which their children learn. We see the relationship between families and early childhood education settings as a two-way dialogue and are committed to realizing the potential of this often-untapped lever for child development by integrating family engagement approaches and family supports across our grantmaking portfolio. We plan to support states to build systems that hold families at the center and acknowledge explicitly the primary role of families in early learning and will explore strategies to institutionalize meaningful family engagement practices.

## IX. WHAT INVESTMENT PRINCIPLES GUIDE OUR STRATEGY?

### *A focus on applied research and dissemination*

We intend to invest in applied research and dissemination activities that answer critical questions posed by policy makers and practitioners. We also intend to invest in implementation research to better understand the strengths and challenges of EC&E systems and policies that have been implemented at scale (e.g., New York City’s universal prekindergarten program and birth-to-three system). We will prioritize action-oriented research over studies that are predominantly focused on knowledge-building. We will use evidence rigorously in our grantmaking and in the assessment of its results.

### *A high-leverage, catalytic role in the early childhood field by working mostly through publicly-funded systems*

Philanthropy can play a powerful, but limited, role in influencing child outcomes. We seek to have our philanthropy achieve reach beyond the direct impact of the grants, sustain beyond the duration of the grants, and attract other organizations, and particularly other funders, to contribute to shared objectives over time. Therefore, we will prioritize working in existing publicly-funded settings and systems and those that already serve children from low-income families and children of color. However, recognizing the needs of families who may not have access to these services, we may engage in exploratory grantmaking outside of those systems.

### *A focus on system building*

There are many service delivery settings and ECE programs at the local, county, state, and national levels that contribute to the development of young children prior to school entry. Up until the late 1990s, policymaking and field-building for ECE were focused on creating and delivering programs and services to young children and their families. The result of these programmatically-focused efforts was a patchwork of programs and services, typically highly targeted, and sometimes duplicative. Despite efforts to enhance the early learning experiences and lives of young children and their families, the major problems facing the field persisted, including gaps in access to ECE programs and services, low-quality of ECE programs, an unstable ECE workforce, and inadequate and unsustainable financing for ECE.

In attempting to understand these challenges, policy makers and scholars began to re-think how to improve the field. They turned their focus away from program-level investments and toward investments in an infrastructure for ECE, otherwise called an ECE system. Systems more broadly can be defined as a set of processes and structures that work together over time to produce a set of outcomes.

An ECE system includes seven critical elements. These elements, depicted below in Figure 11, include:

- (1) **financing** for programs and services;
- (2) **workforce/professional development** supports to the early childhood workforce;
- (3) **accountability** measures—including a unified **data** system—to ensure that early learning programs and other service delivery providers meet quality and fiscal benchmarks;
- (4) **outreach to and engagement with** families, communities, and the K-12 school system;
- (5) **standards** including early learning and development standards, program standards, and standards for professional preparation;
- (6) **regulations** that set forth a baseline set of health and safety requirements; and
- (7) a defined approach to **governance** to oversee and manage the development and implementation of the other six system elements, the programs and services that these system elements are designed to support (Kagan & Gomez, 2015; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012).



**Figure 3.** The seven elements of an ECE system, with governance as the driver of system development and coherence.

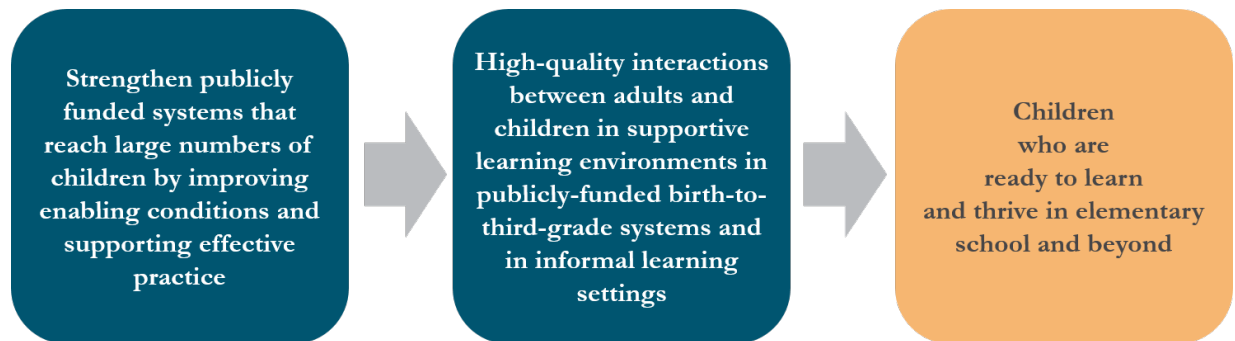
Many states have made progress on early education systems by: launching program quality improvement initiatives (e.g., Quality Rating Improvement Systems, coaching, mentoring); addressing deficiencies and instability in the ECE workforce; revising Early Learning and Development Standards and ensuring they are aligned with K-12 standards and with developmentally-appropriate assessments; garnering increased and sustainable funds for ECE; and creating new governance structures and processes through which to manage the rest of the ECE system and to efficiently and effectively manage ECE programs and services. Many localities have engaged in similar efforts, replicating what states have done. At the federal level, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education under President Obama encouraged states to build ECE systems by offering competitive grant funding via the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Fund (RTTT-ELCF). RTTT-ELCF did not provide any funds for direct services (i.e., slots for subsidized care), but rather provided significant funding to create state systems. Other federal efforts in the Obama Administration focused on specific system elements, such as revising the standards for Head Start programs or health and safety regulations for federally-supported child care programs.

There is still much to be done. All states have developed *some* elements of an ECE system, but no state has developed *all* elements. Without a broader infrastructure that pulls together disparate programs into a common purpose, families, ECE professionals, and informal caregivers are tugged in many different directions wasting valuable resources and time. A model for the type of system we hope to create is the K-12 system, which, while far from perfect, has all of the system elements articulated above. We believe that the development of a coherent, well-functioning ECE system is a critical first step before effective interventions and best practices can reach wide and durable scale. For this reason, we recommend a focus on system building even as we seek opportunities for promising and innovative practice approaches to support our target population.

The ECE field increasingly believes that coherent system development is essential to effectively serve the workforce, young children, and their families. There is a strong theoretical underpinning for this view and preliminary evidence to confirm these assumptions (Dichter, 2015; Gomez & Kagan, 2015; Office of Child Development and Early Learning, 2014). Pennsylvania and Washington, for example,

have reported gains in child outcomes since the inception of their early childhood education systems. Nevertheless, so far there is only limited evidence linking systems development to child outcomes. Given this reality, we expect to invest in applied research to test whether and how systems-development supports learning outcomes for children, particularly children living in poverty and children of color.

Studying the relationship between systemic change and child outcomes is challenging for a number of reasons. In part, it is because systems are continually evolving. Additionally, the ongoing work on state systems is to a considerable extent driven by local political and cultural context. What works in Pennsylvania, for example, may not work in Georgia. However, without additional evidence, state and federal policymakers may be loath to allocate resources to system-building efforts.



**Figure 4.** The logic behind our focus on system building, which includes practice improvements.

### ***A national domain, with a particular focus on California***

Since the beginning, the Foundation has been a national foundation and we plan to remain so, particularly in the areas of research, evaluation, and the creation of effective policies and high-leverage systems. However, we are proposing an increased emphasis on California as one way of bringing greater focus to our grantmaking. We do so because California is where we live and work, it is home to roughly 12 percent of our target population, it is a model for the minority-majority country that the U.S. will eventually become, and it is a bellwether that other states pay attention to and often emulate. We have established co-funding relationships with California-based funders, such as the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, that are similarly focused on early childhood, which means that our efforts and impact can be amplified when our grantmaking aligns. Where and when we have equally high-impact investment choices between California and other states, we intend to invest in California.

## **X. WHAT WAYS OF WORKING CHARACTERIZE OUR APPROACH?**

### ***Our commitment to philanthropic collaboration***

We recognize the power of working collaboratively with other funders. It provides opportunities to learn from one another, leads to better strategies, brings additional resources to bear on critical points of leverage, and sends more aligned signals to the field. We seek to work with other funders on our major initiatives and plan to report regularly on our collaborative efforts.

### ***Our focus on the needs and capacity of the field***

We would like our grantmaking to be driven by those who are most affected by poverty and systemic inequities, as well as the needs of young children, their families, and the ECE workforce. As such, we are committed to building the capacity and diversity of the ECE field.

We will hold ourselves accountable to our grantees whose voices and needs will guide our work. This means that we will be open to feedback even and especially when it provides disconfirming evidence that we are having the impact we desire. We will convene field leaders regularly to assess our progress in this area and intend to explore ways of bringing the beneficiary voice to our nonprofit partners and our own grantmaking.

### ***Our commitment to improvement, measurement, and learning***

The changes in outcomes we seek, will take many years to achieve. Any philanthropic strategy is a collection of hypotheses about how such change might occur. Therefore, we are committed to the development of interim milestones; the creation of explicit learning agendas; and the adoption of a regular process of measuring, monitoring, and managing the results of our strategy using a rigorous evaluation framework.

### ***Our pragmatism and non-ideological position in the field***

Our focus is on young children from low-income families and children of color. Holding their achievement and progress as the ultimate goal, we are committed to discovering what works to create better outcomes and supporting more of what works at the largest scale possible. We recognize that we do not have all the answers, and we seek to be open-minded and responsive to new information as we learn about different approaches to systems-building and innovative pedagogy. We feel the urgency of the task ahead and will resist the temptation to make the perfect be the enemy of the good. Instead, we will seek gains as they become achievable even as we work for transformative change.

### ***Our willingness and ability to take risks***

Our refreshed strategy focuses on root causes and is guided by evidence. We intend to make big bets and remain committed for the long haul. Along with risk, comes critique. We anticipate that some of the more innovative strategies pursued by the Foundation and our grantees may engender pushback. We see this as one marker that we are taking risks. Other indicators may include a higher proportion of “failed” grants or being first to support a new organization or approach before it has established a track record.

## XI. HOW WILL WE ORGANIZE OUR PORTFOLIOS OF WORK?

### *The proposed structure of our portfolio*

The majority of our work will reside in two portfolios, each with multiple lines of work:

- **Enabling Conditions:** Where we focus on creating the conditions that best enable high-quality adult-child interactions and positive learning environments. This is where we will house our major initiatives to create functional early childhood workforce systems and other efforts.
- **Effective Practice:** Where we focus on supporting effective practices within the systems and settings in which children develop and learn. Our major initiatives focused on early math, family engagement, and dual language learners and other children furthest from opportunity will be included here.

We anticipate a complementary relationship between our two portfolios. In systems and settings where the right enabling conditions are in place (e.g., clear goals for child development, aligned instructional materials, well prepared and compensated adults, adequate funding), the greatest gains will come from investments in effective practice. Where these are not yet in place, investments to create stronger enabling conditions will be an important consideration as we invest in effective practice.

Each portfolio will include multiple major initiatives and core operating support for ongoing activities, such as policy advocacy. A major initiative is a multi-year, multi-grant sub-portfolio designed to address a specific challenge that prevents progress toward our goals. We envision that most major initiatives will have a long-term duration and anticipate a formal review five years into these initiatives to assess progress to date and the value of continuing to support the work. We are planning multiple initiatives under each of these broad topical areas. The efforts described in the next several pages are our recommended first moves, not the entirety of our plans.

Education Program Portfolios	
Enabling Conditions	Effective Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Systems in Multiple States</li><li>• California Systems</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Early Math</li><li>• Family Engagement</li><li>• Dual Language Learners/ Vulnerable Populations</li></ul>

Figure 5. The architecture of our portfolio.

## The Logic Chain for the Education Portfolio

The Enabling Conditions and Effective Practice portfolios work together to increase the presence of high-quality interactions between adults and children.

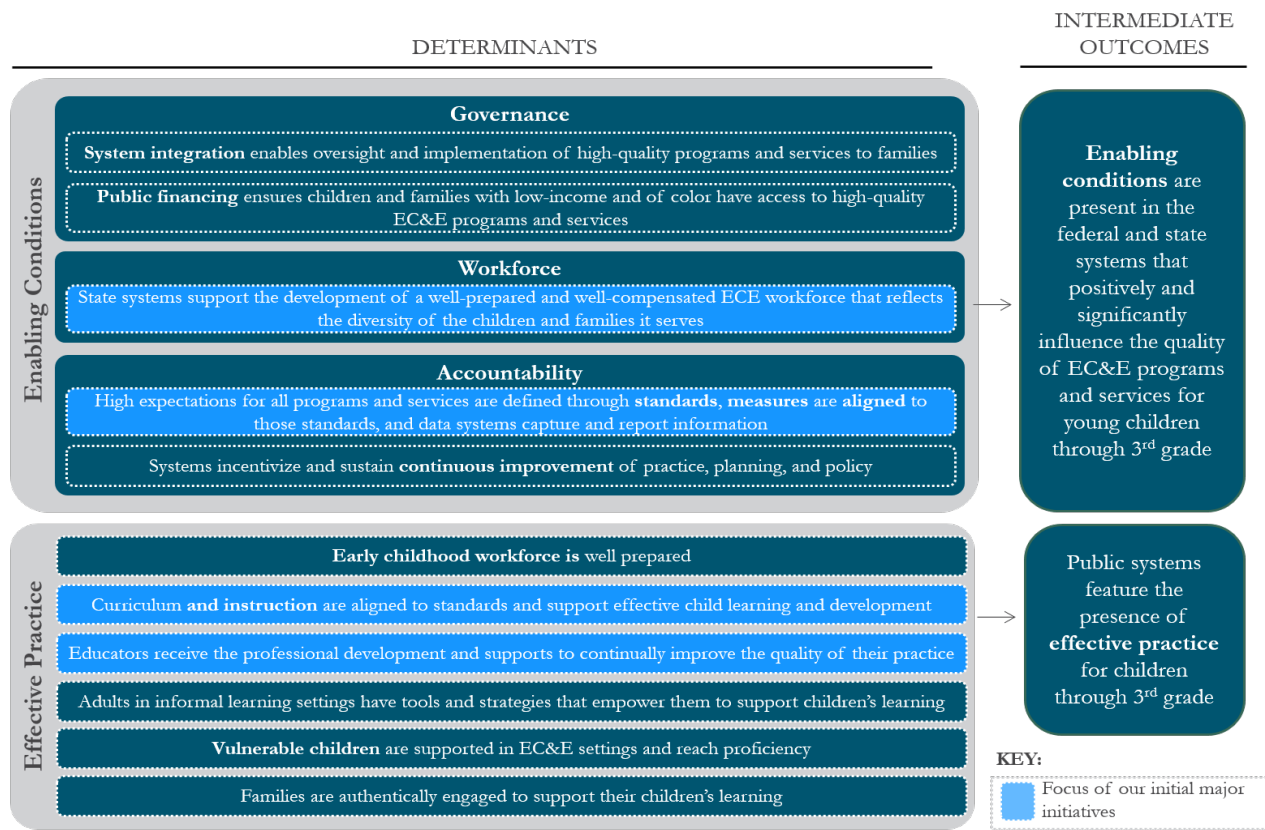
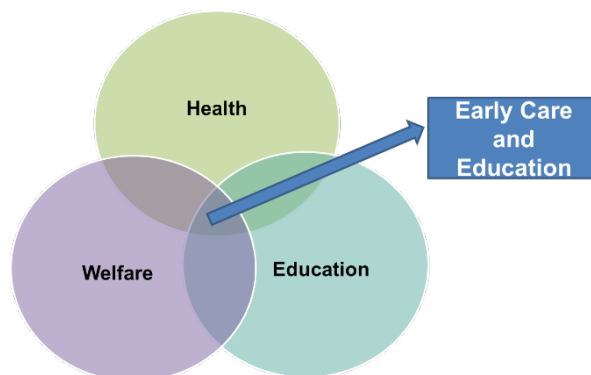


Figure 6. The overall logic chain for the strategy.

## *Understanding the Linkages Across Elements of Our Portfolio*

### **Enabling Conditions**

This portfolio is based upon creating synergy between the national and California work in service of facilitating systems that will help children in poverty and children of color reach their full potential. The field of EC&E exists at the intersection of health, welfare, and education, as depicted in Figure 15 below. Each of these fields is governed by its own set of social norms and political constraints. EC&E policies are often nested within one of these fields; this is, in part, why the EC&E field suffers from significant policy fragmentation and a lack of coherent infrastructure.



**Figure 7.** The early care and education system is comprised of three separate sectors, health, welfare, and education. Welfare refers to the set of programs such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families that provide temporary financial support to low-income.

For young children prenatal to age three, health tends to be the dominant field (e.g., families often look to their pediatricians for developmental advice). In the three- to five-year age range, education and health are equally dominant (many early childhood education programs, like Head Start, put a priority on both health and education). For children ages five through eight, education is the dominant field influencing their experiences. The welfare field influences policies in EC&E (e.g., many child care subsidy polices are enacted because of public welfare policies) but is not solely dominant.

Nationally, the focus will be on the early childhood education segment of the broader early care and education field for two reasons: (1) the Foundation’s resources are finite, and to focus on influencing EC&E policy and systems, in total, would dilute our desired impact; and, (2) much of the momentum across the country at present is in the education system. An example of this is the press for universal prekindergarten and P-3 alignment work underway in a majority of states and localities. Within the ECE segment, we will focus on helping states create functional ECE systems that are family-centered and promote high-quality teacher-child interactions.

Within California, the emphasis will cross all three sectors. This is for two reasons. First, since California is a bellwether state and economic powerhouse, California could become an exemplar for coherent EC&E policy and system-building that places children and families at the center. Second, California has a unique infrastructure in its First 5 county-based networks, which are supported by dedicated state revenues provided through Proposition 10 and are working across the health, education, and welfare sectors. However, even as we propose to work broadly across the spectrum, it should be noted that because of the complexity of these three interacting sectors, we are entering a field that is new to us. Therefore, we propose to start our California systems-building work with a data initiative, as a means of better comprehending the complex experiences of young children and families with publicly-funded systems.

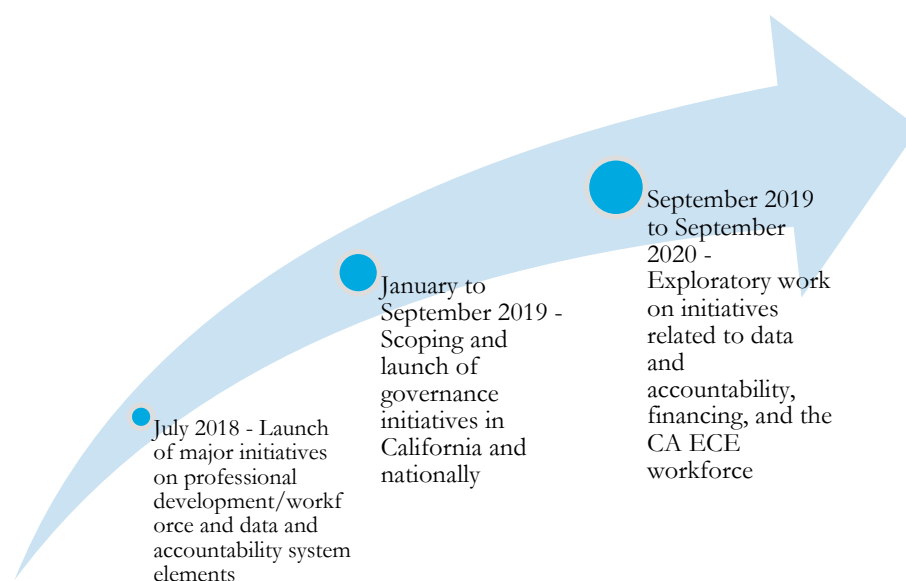
The major initiatives in the Enabling Conditions portfolio will reinforce one another. The proposed initiatives focus on three system elements, both in California and nationally: ECE workforce and professional development, data and accountability, and governance. We also intend to include a



separate push on financing, depending upon budget and staffing. Each initiative will be built out based on the context and momentum in the field:

- **Nationally:** there is momentum across the country among early childhood funders to focus on the workforce and professional development systems. The first major initiative being developed for the national work capitalizes on this energy. At the appropriate time, staff will build out or work with other funders to support a major initiative in California that mirrors the work happening at the national level. This initiative is described on pages 32-33.
- **In California:** there is an opportunity to work on the data and accountability system element. California lags behind much of the nation in developing an early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS) for tracking children’s educational progress and healthy development. In anticipation of the gubernatorial transition and a policy climate possibly more conducive to data initiatives, advocates, researchers, and state agency staff are developing a plan for a robust implementation. The Foundation has taken initial steps to support that work via a major initiative that focuses on the data and accountability system element. This initiative is described on pages 34-35.

Other major initiatives will focus on creating functional approaches to governance of EC&E systems—in particular ensuring that these systems are accessible to and support families—and a national major initiative on data and accountability (and possibly financing) in ECE systems. These will be built out over the next two years. The team plans to engage with existing and prospective grantees and other field experts to assist with the development of these initiatives. In this work, we will ensure that the systems-development work we are supporting holds children and families at the center. For example, the national competencies being developed as a part of the workforce initiative include helping teachers effectively engage families in their children’s learning experiences; these competencies will be embedded in teacher preparation programs. In scoping the other major initiatives for the nationally-focused work, we will convene state leaders and field experts on family engagement to develop strategies and potential grants that ensure family engagement is a priority of the system development in the states we support.



**Figure 8.** The proposed timeline for launch of Enabling Conditions major initiatives.

## **Effective Practice**

The goal of the Effective Practice portfolio is to improve educational proficiency rates for young children from low-income families and children of color by 10 percentage points over the next 10 years in California and contribute to our longer-term national goals. We will focus on the levers that evidence tells us are most likely to help achieve that proficiency goal. Each initiative will be identified and built out based on context and momentum in the field.

### ***Early Math***

One of these levers—identified early in the Foundation’s grantmaking history—is early math. Early math skills are the strongest correlates to later academic achievement in math and literacy, which in turn are linked to later academic and life outcomes. The evidence continues to accrue, and among K-12 educators, there is already recognition that math is important. While not necessarily taught as effectively as it could be, math is taught in every public-school classroom in the country. It is protected in ways that other subjects are not—because it is tested. Within this context, and in recognition of the foundational importance of early math skills and growth, there is momentum in the field to address the quality of instruction in early math for all children, especially for those who are being left behind. Our first major initiative targets the quality of the teacher-child instructional relationship across the earliest years of schooling, in an effort to work within the far-reaching public-school system to improve its offerings.

### ***Family Engagement***

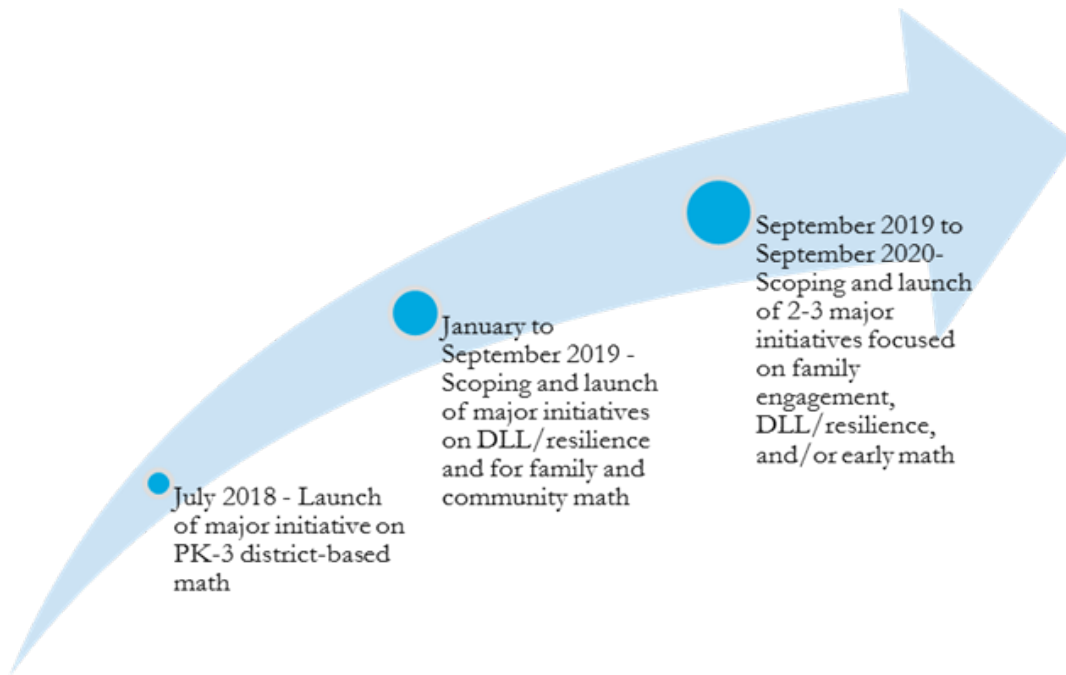
To reach large numbers of children and families, we are considering an initiative focused on embedding family engagement at a systemic/institutional level. For the 0-5 years, we have a track record of partnering with family-serving organizations with large reach to engage with families (e.g., the medical system through Reach Out and Read; Y-USA; Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors, home visiting programs, Early Head Start), and we expect to continue to seek strategic system partners.

We also plan a major initiative focused on family and community math. The Foundation has made significant investments in this burgeoning area and is a recognized leader in it. The drivers of these earlier investments included understanding of the importance of early math coupled with awareness that children, especially the youngest learners, spend more time outside of school settings than in them. Drawing on family and community assets to empower families to support young children’s math learning can foster mathematical learning before children go to school, enhance classroom efforts in math, and lead to stronger achievement outcomes.

### ***Children furthest from opportunity***

While we are at the beginning of our work to form strategies in the non-math portion of our Effective Practice portfolio, we know that the same grounding in evidence, context, and field momentum will apply. These drivers have led the Foundation to invest in policies and practice to support the educational success of dual language learners, and investments in this area are expected to continue. Prior strategy included efforts to work across the PK-3 years to support and evaluate workforce development efforts that better prepare educators to teach young dual language learners in pedagogically sound and linguistically- and culturally-rooted ways. While the specific strategies are yet to be decided, an approach like this would dovetail well with the proposed early math initiative in that it works within an existing system that serves millions of children with the goal of improving the teacher-child instructional interactions that are critical for school success.

The relationship between California and national grantmaking differs from that in the Enabling Conditions portfolio. While that portfolio builds out separate initiatives that inform and mirror each other as the work progresses, our major initiative in the Effective Practice portfolio will focus mostly on California. We will also maintain a portfolio of national grants that provide the key infrastructure and knowledge base to support the field with a particular focus on early determinants of educational equity. A timeline for planned initiatives is provided below:



**Figure 9.** The proposed timeline for launch of Effective Practice major initiatives.

## XII. PROPOSED MAJOR INITIATIVES

*We are recommending three major initiatives at this time:*

- **Stabilizing the Early Childhood Education Workforce:** *This major initiative is covered in brief on pages 32-33.*
- **Ensuring Accountability through a Data for Action Framework in California:** *This major initiative is covered in brief on pages 34-35.*
- **Creating Coherent Early Math Instruction in California from School Entry to Third Grade:** *This major initiative is covered in brief on pages 36-37.*

*The design of each major initiative was guided by the following lines of inquiry:*

- What settings and systems best reach the children that we seek to impact? Are there meaningful opportunities to work outside of formal education and care systems?
- In formal settings and systems, what would it take to influence significantly the core adult-child interactions and supportive learning environments that drive improvement in child outcomes?
- What are the primary challenges that prevent these developmental mechanisms from working as well as they might otherwise (e.g., a scarcity of adults properly trained in developmental practices)?
- What logic would we articulate to show how we could address these challenges, and improve those adult-child interactions and learning environments to a significant degree, at a significant scale?

## a. Major Initiative: Stabilizing the Early Childhood Education Workforce

### Goal and Rationale

Research indicates that a well-prepared and well-compensated teacher is a critical component of a high-quality ECE program (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011). Evidence suggests that the teacher-child interaction is one of the strongest drivers of child outcomes in the early years, particularly for young children living in poverty (IOM & NRC, 2015; Schweinhart, 2000). To that end, the long-term goal of our stabilizing the early childhood education workforce initiative is to ensure that all professionals in the workforce have the knowledge, skills, and institutional supports needed to effectively foster young children's growth and development.

The seminal [2015 Institute of Medicine consensus report](#) on transforming the early childhood workforce and the [2018 Institute of Medicine consensus report on Financing](#) early childhood education generated significant momentum in the field to not just create new programs to support the ECE workforce but to build the system that undergirds workforce preparation and compensation. In response, many ECE funders have committed to taking collective action to improve the status of the ECE workforce, making this an opportune time to invest in this space.

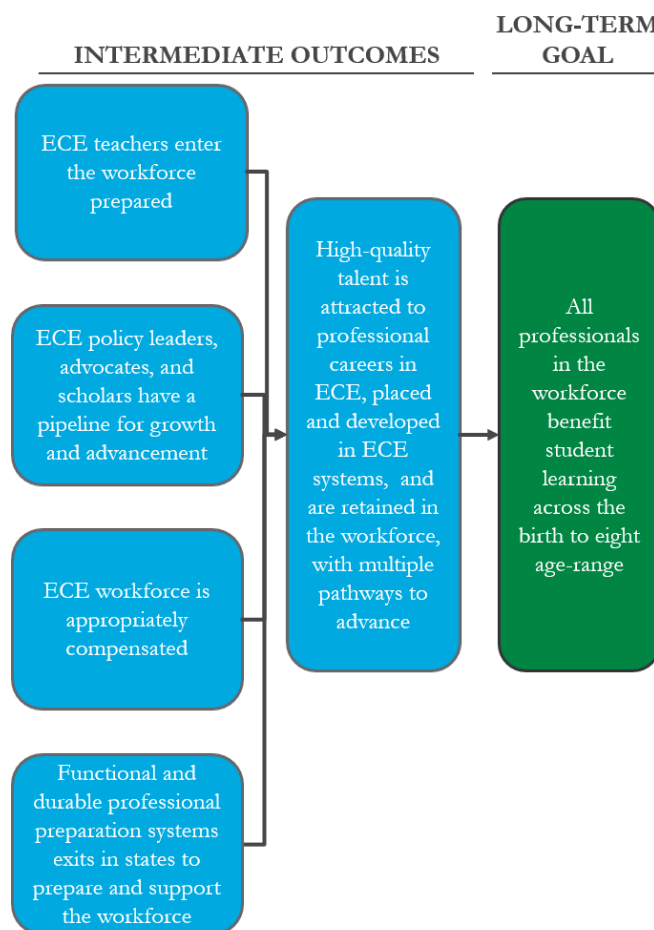


Figure 10. Initiative Logic Chain.

### Key Levers

Several structural, social, and political levers will be critical to address to achieve this goal:

- The workforce is prepared, by creating strong and consistent requirements across geographies and program types (IOM & NRC, 2015).
- The workforce includes diverse policy leaders, by creating a diverse cohort of early childhood policy leaders who have deep knowledge and skills related to early childhood pedagogy, child development, public policy, and early childhood systems (Gomez & Kagan, 2016).
- The workforce is appropriately compensated, by building public and political will for ECE as a profession (Robinson & Stark, 2005; NAEYC 2018) and ensuring adequate compensation for the ECE workforce (National Academies Press, 2001; IOM & NRC, 2018).
- State workforce systems are created or enhanced, by creating coherent state ECE systems that influence workforce development (Kagan & Cohen, 1997; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012).

## The Foundation's Role and Priorities

We will invest in each of these four key levers, either independently or in collaboration with other funders, to create the enabling conditions for all ECE professionals to impact student learning.

- *The Workforce is Prepared.* One primary focus will be the Early Childhood Workforce Investment Initiative (EC WIIN), a national collaborative of eight funders that is working to reimagine the system of teacher qualifications and preparation in states. EC WIIN's near-term priorities are to create a new national consortium to support national teacher competencies and partner with states to reform their teacher preparation pipelines to align to these competencies.
- *The Workforce Includes Diverse Policy Leaders.* We will also amplify efforts to build a diverse pipeline of ECE policy leaders. This would include (1) creating a cadre of leaders with deep theoretical and clinical/practical knowledge of ECE, and (2) ensuring that these new leaders are diverse across a variety of dimensions that mirror the demographics of the children and families being served in ECE programs.
- *The Workforce is Appropriately Compensated.* A third area of grantmaking involves building public will for increased compensation for the ECE workforce and for public financing of ECE more broadly. This work would include supporting advocacy and policy organizations to develop policy analyses of state compensation policies, create innovative public financing strategies, and engage in grassroots organizing and mobilization.
- *State Workforce Systems are Created/Enhanced.* Finally, we will deepen our investments in state workforce systems. This work would include continuing to support national technical assistance organizations to develop new tools to help states build or improve their professional development/workforce systems and launching a new set of investments to support states in engaging in cross-cutting system building efforts in financing and accountability.

## Interim Milestones

To track progress towards its long-term goal, we would set a five-year interim milestone that 3-5 states will have made progress towards implementing a coherent, durable workforce system, marked by:

- Professional preparation requirements that are grounded in national ECE competencies, and that embrace the national ECE credential as the standard of certification and licensure for ECE professionals.
- Compensation that is on par with K-12 workforce (e.g., similar benefits, commensurate salary).
- A public financing strategy or strategies that are utilized for workforce compensation and preparation.
- A set of professional development supports that ensure teachers participate in in-service professional development that is job-embedded and grounded in a continuous quality improvement cycle.

## ***b. Major Initiative: Ensuring Accountability through a “Data for Action” Framework in California***

### **Goal and Rationale**

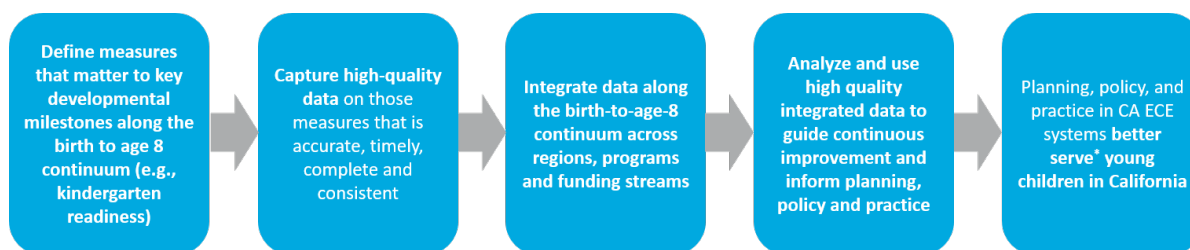
The opportunity gap for children from low-income families and children of color persists despite increased efforts by early childhood funders and advocates. There is growing consensus in the field about the pressing need to re-think and reconstruct the funding and service delivery model ([Building an Early Learning System That Works, LPI, 2018](#)). The structure of early childhood systems and funding streams diverge from children’s developmental trajectory and are fragmented across the age range. The result is twofold: systems face many challenges in delivering services, and children do not experience continuity of care and learning. Family surveys suggest that the difficulty of navigating systems and a lack of service continuity and stability create significant barriers for families to meet the needs of children.

The long-term goal of the initiative is to enable public agencies in California to meet the needs of young children and families by using high-quality integrated data to guide continuous improvement and inform planning, policy, practice, and operations to ultimately create an integrated family-driven system of services for young children. California in particular is ripe for this work, as nonprofits in the field have already done the initial ground work, and we are anticipating a more receptive environment for these kinds of initiatives.

### **Key Levers**

Using data to improve planning, policy, and practice in early childhood systems will require successfully completing four steps in the data continuum:

- Defining measures that matter to key developmental milestones along the birth-to-age-8 continuum.
- Capturing high-quality data on those measures that is accurate, timely, complete, and consistent.
- Integrating data along birth-to-age-8 across regions, programs, and funding streams.
- Analyzing and using high quality data to guide continuous improvement and inform planning, policy, and practice.



**Figure 11.** Initiative logic chain (\*“Better serve” indicates children receiving the services they need).

Our theory of change hypothesizes that as systems become more integrated and appropriate measures are in place, children and families in public systems are properly screened to identify their needs, and are connected to services that promote their child’s optimal learning and development. For example, a family may enter the system through a visit to the pediatrician’s office. During this visit, the child would receive a standardized developmental screening, and the family would be engaged in learning about their child’s development and how to support their child. Before leaving, the pediatrician’s office would refer the family to additional needed services, such as occupational therapy. In addition, the screening results could be shared across public institutions (with appropriate privacy safeguards) to notify other public agencies whose programs the family qualifies for, in order to ensure the unique needs of the family and child are met.

## The Foundation's Role and Priorities

The Foundation will begin investing in this space through exploratory grantmaking in two key areas:

- *Measuring What Matters* to establish appropriate measures and indicators of family and child well-being to track child outcomes throughout the 0-8 continuum.
- *Integrating Data*, including:
  - *Maximizing Child-Level Data* to advance the linkage and integration of child-level data across early childhood systems to better identify needs and improve coordination of services for children and families.
  - *Maximizing Population-Level Data* to advance linkage and integration of population data across systems to shed light on inequity, identify geographic areas of need, inform opportunities to improve systems and policies at various levels, and to guide the investment of public resources.

## Interim Milestones

To understand the landscape of related efforts in California and how the Foundation's resources can be best invested, milestones in the first year of this work would include:

- *Measuring What Matters*
  - Completing an initial landscape of what milestones and measures are being captured by agencies and institutional partners across California.
  - Engaging key stakeholders in California, including potential co-funders, to initiate a statewide process for identifying key milestones and appropriate measures for California.
- *Integrating Child & Population Level Data*
  - Determining the best areas for the Foundation to fund.
  - Identifying the public or institutional partners who are most ready to conduct initial pilots, as well as the objectives of those pilots.
  - Identifying the first wave of champions in the First 5 systems and the California state departments with jurisdiction over young children (i.e. Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services).

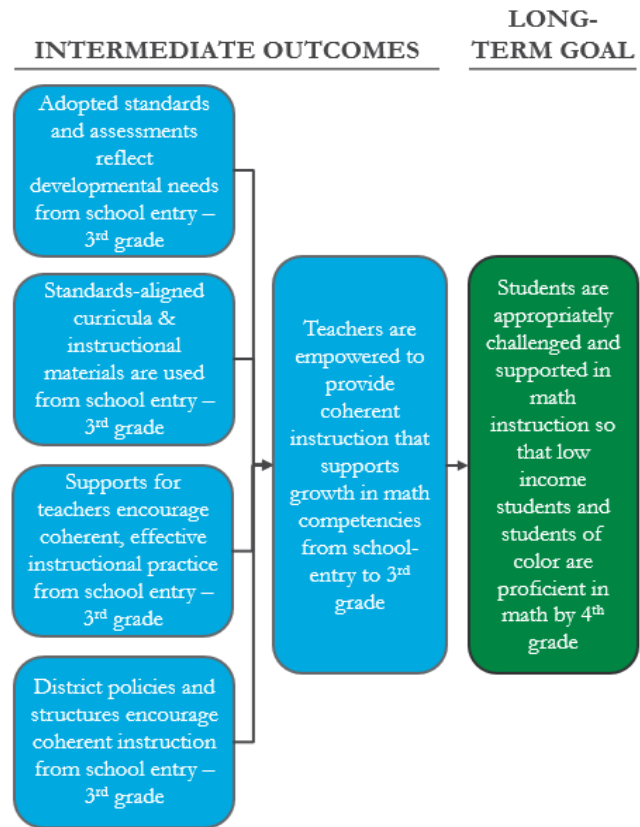


**c. Major Initiative: Creating Coherent Early Math Instruction in California from School Entry to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade**

**Goal and Rationale**

A growing body of research reveals that early mathematical skills correlate more strongly with academic skills in later elementary school than any other early indicator tested (Claessens, Duncan, & Engel, 2009; Duncan, et al., 2007). In addition, researchers have identified growth in mathematical skills across the early years of schooling as an even more powerful correlate to later achievement (Watts et al., 2014; Claessens et al., 2009). These findings suggest that if students develop strong early foundations in math and are given the opportunity to build on these foundations through early elementary school, they are more likely to become proficient by 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

At the same time, research shows that children from families with low incomes and children of color are less likely than their peers to be proficient in math by 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The proposed major initiative seeks to ensure that these students are appropriately challenged and supported in math instruction in the early years of school to reach their full potential. The Foundation’s investments in early math and in prenatal-3 and PreK-3 coherence position us uniquely to help adapt and spread coherent math practices in California. There is momentum in the field for PK-3 approaches, making this a good time to invest in coherent math instruction.



**Figure 12.** Initiative Logic Chain.

**Key Levers**

Research suggests that children’s math learning, growth, and potential will be maximized when:

- Learning standards are aligned to research-based learning trajectories.
- Written and enacted curricula align to the learning standards and are paced appropriately.
- There are aligned, formative measures of mathematical skills for each grade PK-3, and teachers are equipped to use formative assessments to ensure their instruction meets the specific needs of their students.
- Professional development is designed to foster coherent instruction across grades.
- District structures and policies support teachers to provide coherent instruction across grades.

## The Foundation's Role and Priorities

It is important to create proof points of coherent curricular, assessment, and professional development models that improve student outcomes to confirm the promise of coherent math instruction and ultimately spread effective practices across California. The Foundation will support pilot projects in which curriculum, formative assessments, and instructional practices align with standards that are themselves consistent with the evidence base that describes children's mathematics learning trajectories and their developmental needs. Through such work, we will:

- Identify the facilitators and barriers in districts that have taken a coherence approach, creating a playbook that can be used in districts that wish to incorporate similar approaches.
- Develop a toolkit of curricula, formative assessments, and professional development models.
- Build the case for the effectiveness of a coherent math approach for children's learning outcomes.
- Use the evidence and toolkit to convince California administrators to prioritize coherent math instruction, spreading innovative, effective approaches to districts across the state.

The Foundation's initial priority would be information-gathering and learning to inform its strategy, including:

- Identifying strong, existing PK-3 coherence approaches in districts and communities to clarify what has worked, for whom, and under what circumstances—and to identify opportunities for integration of math into existing efforts.
- Identifying the ways that families and communities have been engaged in successful coherence approaches (e.g., as advocates for equitable instruction and outcomes, as co-learners with educators, in PK-3 learning cohorts for family engagement programs).
- Assessing the market for PK-3 math coherence in California districts.
- Identifying promising assessment tools and curricular and professional support models for math that could be used (or expanded and adapted) to support coherent math instruction, PK-3.
- Mapping philanthropic investments to avoid duplicating efforts and to leverage existing efforts for learning or partnership.

The Foundation is poised to support the field on PK-3 coherence in early math in California, due in large part to the Foundation's prior and existing math investments in the state. Our pivot aligns well with state priorities, as Governor Brown's 2018-2019 budget includes \$11.8 million for early math, PK-3.

## Interim Milestones

The Foundation would seek to achieve several interim milestones in the next three to five years:

- More districts in California will consider the importance of coherence for improving student outcomes and will understand enabling conditions and potential challenges to implementation of coherence approaches.
- Tools will be developed that enable districts to assess their readiness to pursue coherence, as well as identify enabling conditions and potential barriers, including the district track record with authentic community and family engagement around new educational initiatives.
- Research-practice partnerships will increase the knowledge base and the toolkit of approaches for districts.

### **XIII. HOW WILL WE MONITOR, EVALUATE, AND MANAGE THE IMPACT OF OUR STRATEGY?**

We have set ambitious goals for our strategy. Achieving these goals will require well-designed, evidence-based major initiatives and a high degree of rigor and discipline in how we monitor our progress, identify higher-impact opportunities over time, and successfully adapt our strategy each year.

While our major initiatives are informed by evidence, there is still much that is unknown about what it will take to reach our goals. The logic chains for each initiative represent theories and assumptions that will be continually tested and refined as we learn. The faster we learn and adapt, the better able we will be to make progress on our goals for children.

Accordingly, we have defined concrete milestones for our major initiatives that create objective standards for our processes of learning and improvement. Over the next year, as various elements of the major initiatives are launched, we will update the timing of the milestones to capture when each element begins. Each major initiative also includes a learning agenda—what we are trying to learn in the early years of our grantmaking.

We will use a regular annual cycle to inform progress and to support adjustments to our strategy. The cycle will culminate with a set of recommended amendments to our strategy each year. Each spring, the Education Team will engage in a formal process to review results from the past year of grantmaking, assess progress and lessons learned, and decide how to adapt our priorities and initiatives to improve the impact of the strategy. We will gather and assess information from multiple sources including grantee reports and discussions, counsel from expert advisors, and periodic evaluations conducted by external consultants or firms.

Our objective is to develop a true sense of partnership with our grantees, particularly with those grantees who will be multi-year partners on our major initiatives. We will rely on them for information and periodic formative assessments of our collective work. We will co-create milestones with our grantees that align with our common goals and consider progress against these shared metrics in making subsequent funding decisions. We will also conduct formal evaluations of our major initiatives and the work of key grantees.

As a complement to tracking our progress initiative by initiative, we will track progress toward our California and national goals. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, used to define our near-term California and long-term North Star goal, is released every two years. We also will track updates to the workforce index developed by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. Such intermediate indicators of progress will inform the overall strategy and specific major initiatives.

## ***XVIII. CONCLUSION***

The strategy described in this plan is guided by ambitious goals and built on lessons learned from prior grantmaking. It was developed using investment principles animated by the objective of achieving educational equity, at scale. We look forward to commencing the next stage of our journey to create the early childhood systems necessary for children from low-income families and children of color to reach their full potential by the year 2044.