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California Lacks Facility Space for One in Five Preschoolers, Study Shows

53 of 58 California Counties Face Space Shortfall; Preschool Advocates and Policy-Makers Urged to Address Challenge

Sacramento – As policy-makers renew their efforts to expand preschool access following the defeat of Proposition 82, a new study shows that a much larger, logistical problem must be dealt with first: California currently lacks facility space for approximately one in five preschoolers.

The study, “California’s Preschool Space Challenge: *What preschool advocates, parents, and policy-makers need to know,*” released today by the Advancement Project Los Angeles, also revealed that the facilities shortfall disproportionately affects low-income children, children of color, children whose parents do not speak English at home and who did not finish high school – the very children who would most benefit from expanding access to preschool.

“California is facing a severe shortage of physical space to house our preschoolers and few counties are spared,” said Molly Munger, co-director of the Advancement Project Los Angeles, a national public policy and civil rights advocacy organization. “This report makes clear that an expanded preschool program won’t help California’s kids if there is no room to house them. Unless we first address this facilities challenge, preschool advocates and policy-makers risk putting the cart before the horse.”

“The good news is that the challenge is manageable, and the solution is affordable,” she continued.

The report examines available preschool space under two potential scenarios: a universal “Preschool for All” scenario and a more “Targeted” approach that makes preschool available to children in low-performing schools. Twenty-one percent of the state’s 4-year-olds lack a preschool space under either scenario.

“By now, the benefits of preschool are well established and Californians overwhelmingly support expanding preschool access,” said California Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez. “This report makes one thing clear for policymakers: any future efforts to expand access must take stock of facilities and existing available space to house these preschoolers.”

While the shortfall is more pronounced in urban counties such as Los Angeles, Sacramento, Alameda, and San Diego, suburban counties such as Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange, and Ventura counties are all classified as severe shortage counties.

Rural counties like Fresno, Kern, and Merced are just as likely to face a space shortfall. In all, 53 of the state's 58 counties contain an unbalanced mix of areas with extreme facilities needs as well as areas where there is virtually no need for additional facilities.

For the full report and a complete list of the counties with the most severe space shortfall go to: www.advanceproj.org/preschoolspace

“Addressing facilities challenges will be critical to our efforts to expand preschool access for the children who need it most or for children in our lowest performing school areas,” said Catherine Atkin, executive director of Preschool California.

The study identifies potential costs associated with addressing the shortfall. It would cost \$454 million to meet the facilities needs associated with the “Targeted” scenario. Meeting facilities needs under a more universal “Preschool for All” scenario would be equal to 10 percent of the overall cost of delivering a “Preschool for All” program over ten years.

“There remains strong across the board support for expanding access to preschool in California,” said Ted Lempert, president of Children Now. “As advocates propose policy solutions to meet that goal, we have to make sure that we’re first expanding access for the children who need it most. This report is an eye opener and raises a red flag for anyone who is interested in seeing to it that our neediest children have a space in preschool.”

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Advancement Project is a law and policy organization that identifies, creates and promotes new strategies for achieving inclusion and equity. With offices in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, Advancement Project was founded by civil rights lawyers to pursue broader, multi-disciplinary approaches to problems of opportunity, inclusion and equity.