

**EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN SERVICES
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY**

TO: Legislation Committee Members

DATE: March 28, 2014

cc Kathy Gallagher
David Twa

FROM: Camilla Rand, Director of Community Services

SUBJECT: Memo Outlining Concerns and Unanswered Questions Regarding Senate Bill 837,
Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2014

Please see attached memo with regards to Senate Bill 827 (Steinberg). This memo, developed in partnership with early care and education leaders throughout the state and county outlines several issues that could impact Head Start and other essential programs in Contra Costa County.

Recommendation:

Early care and education leaders in Contra Costa County believe that SB 837 must be revised to affirm and build on existing programs, plans and infrastructure for providing comprehensive, evidence-based, high quality early care and education which is developmentally appropriate for all four-year-olds in California. Building upon existing plans and resources provides an alternative to embedding these vital services in the K-12 service delivery system and burdening individual school districts with developing new plans to address SB 837.

We also advocate for key stakeholder groups to be involved in planning discussions moving forward to ensure that multiple perspectives are heard and requirements resulting from the legislation align with current best practices in the field of early care and education.

Concerns and Unanswered Questions Regarding Senate Bill 837 (Steinberg) Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2014

This statement is in response to Senate Bill 837, current legislation expanding Transitional Kindergarten (TK) for all four year old children in California.

While the SB 837 model provides an intriguing pathway to providing universal, high quality preschool for all four year olds, there are concerns with some elements of the legislation. By combining two less-than-ideal existing programs into one system with high, developmentally appropriate standards, California would quickly change the outlook for thousands of children.

One major concern of SB 837 is that K-12 systems are not traditionally providers of early education. Shifting the responsibility for a statewide preschool system onto local school districts that have little or no experience in providing high-quality, developmentally appropriate early education could be risky. The experience of transitional kindergarten up to now has been instructive; some districts have fully embraced the early education model, others have used their kindergarten classrooms as the template. In addition, California schools are currently going through two major reforms, “Common Core” and the Local Control Funding Formula shift that will require significant resources to enact within local districts. SB 837 provides for a five year phase-in, but the question remains as to how well districts will be able to carry out another significant educational program.

In addition to these concerns, there is also question regarding the fate of the federally funded Head Start program. Advocates for the bill have indicated that they expect school districts to carry out all preschool education for four year olds, leaving Head Start to serve only three year olds. This goes against the historical philosophy and intent of Head Start and would likely require a federal waiver of some kind.

Head Start is a national program, developed in 1965 as an integral strategy in the “War on Poverty.” For 50 years, programs nationwide have been providing high quality, evidence-based early care and education to the county’s economically disadvantaged three and four year-olds. While the intent of SB 837 is honorable, there are considerable concerns regarding the impact of this legislation, as written, on the Head Start community in California.

Comprehensive Services: Head Start programs provide comprehensive services to children and their families, which include health, mental health, nutrition, in-depth family support and other services determined to be necessary by family needs assessments, in addition to education and cognitive development services. Rooted in the belief that “it takes a village,” Head Start programs create formal and informal partnerships with community-based programs to ensure that family strengths are built upon and needs are met, resulting in a multi-faceted community-based approach to serving families that meets them where they are and grows with them. The Office of Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, implemented by all Head Start Programs, serves as a roadmap to chart progress in achieving the kinds of outcomes that lead to positive and enduring change for children and families in this community-based effort.

Head Start also specializes in services to children with disabilities and their families, integrating these services into the least restrictive environment by adjusting environments and curricula to meet individualized needs. Head Start is predicated on the belief that these comprehensive services are a vital ingredient to any school readiness program. These services are not present in SB 837, which would mean that many of the nearly 113,000 disadvantaged children might not receive the essential comprehensive services that are designed specifically to help them perform at par or better with their peers living above the poverty level.

Program Standards of Quality: Over 50 years of practice and research have resulted in Head Start Performance Standards and other measures of quality such as CLASS (Classroom Assessment and Scoring System), which ensure that developmentally appropriate practices are present in every aspect of a model early care program. As accountability was enhanced over the years, outcome measures have been required to illustrate that children and families are making the necessary gains as a result of the provision of services. Child outcomes reporting based on standardized assessments and family outcomes reporting, is based on quality of life measures that are a strong component of Head Start systems, whereas SB 837 is silent on such measurement systems.

Head Start standards have long been lauded as the hallmark of quality and have been incorporated into other standards such as those used by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the American Academy of Pediatrics national standards for care of children in out-of-home settings, and California Community Care Title XXII Licensing Standards. Standards, such as these, are absent in the proposed TK for All legislation.

Barriers to Collaboration: While the proposed legislation calls for school districts to collaborate with existing child care entities, many of the requirements make it impossible for most providers, including Head Start, to partner.

- **Teacher Qualifications and Supervision:** There is question as to whether teachers in these programs may be considered school district staff in an effort to address pay equity. It also requires that teachers hold a bachelor's degree (an effort currently underway for Head Start Teachers) and an undetermined teaching credential as opposed to an early childhood specific credential, which appropriately addresses the developmental needs of four-year olds that are very different from those of school-aged children. Confusing the matter is language in SB 837 which says "For purposes of TK operated by a private local provider, 'immediate supervision' means being under the immediate supervision of an employee of the local provider who satisfies the requirements of Section 48005.35." This would seem to raise "exclusive control" problems within the meaning of Section 8, Part IX, of the Constitution.
- **The Use of Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Funding:** While SB 837 proposes to expand the existing TK to ensure the entitlement of this grade level for all California four-year olds and tap education's per child funding under Proposition 98 (ADA), it also would encourage, "shared use arrangements" with a broad array of public and private entities and allow school districts to subcontract transitional kindergarten to a county office of education or to "a private local provider." This language clearly does not require the involvement of community organizations with early care expertise nor does it ensure any method of a mixed delivery of services. Further, there is a legal question to whether public school services can be contracted to a non-public school, community-based provider under the Constitution.

Early care and education leaders in Contra Costa County believe that SB 837 must be revised to affirm and build on existing programs, plans and infrastructure for providing comprehensive, evidence-based, high quality early care and education which is developmentally appropriate for all four-year-olds in California. Building upon existing plans and resources provides an alternative to embedding these vital services in the K-12 service delivery system and burdening individual school districts with developing new plans to address SB 837. We also advocate for key stakeholder groups to be involved in planning discussions moving forward to ensure that multiple perspectives are heard and requirements resulting from the legislation align with current best practices in the field of early care and education.