

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES AIMING FOR QUALITY IN EARLY LEARNING

Focus: Fresno

March 2016

About These Briefs

This series examines how three communities in California are reforming the way early childhood programs work and the way teachers are trained. The profiles give a snapshot of places poised to make significant improvements to their early childhood workforce: Oakland, Fresno, and a school district in San Jose. Over the next few years, New America will observe and learn from these communities, explaining how to improve teaching and learning at a level robust enough to provide a solid foundation for young children's growth and development. We will also be reporting on California over the next year at EdCentral.org. A corollary report, *Not Golden Yet: Building a Workforce for Young Children in California*, published in September, sets the context for statewide policies that affect these communities.

Fresno often tops lists of the poorest cities in America. Despite its location in California's Central Valley, one of the nation's largest agricultural economies, this urban area suffers from high unemployment and rising economic insecurity. The effects of this poverty on the area's young children have been grave. Since 2010, about 10 percent of Fresno County's licensed preschool centers have shut their doors.¹ Nearly half of Fresno's children live in poverty, a rate that jumped by 16 percentage points from 2007.²

The national attention Fresno received for its high poverty rates helped galvanize leaders here to better align their systems to support young children. This work, in turn, attracted increased investments from philanthropy. This new focus has helped increase capacity and access to early learning for children birth through age eight. When money came in from Proposition 30, a ballot measure that increased funding for public education, Fresno Unified School District started shifting resources to the younger ages. It has been investing \$7.4 million annually in early learning since 2011. That money has helped fund 53 new pre-K classrooms, including 18 in 2012-2013. The district has expanded its transitional kindergarten (TK) programs, a new grade level created in California's public schools in 2010. Plus, a public-private coalition has come together to increase the percentage of students who can read proficiently by third grade.

Leaders are looking carefully at improving the quality of programs by supporting the adults who interact with young children in Fresno every day.

*New America uses the term pre-K to include all learning settings for children ages 3 and 4.

Supporting Adults to Support Children

By the end of 2015, Fresno was providing:

- Professional Learning Communities
- Cross-sector professional development
- Developmental screenings
- Support for informal caregivers
- Outreach and training to parents
- Fresno Unified Early Learning Principal's Academy

Five Key Practices That Extend Children's Learning

1. Reading and telling stories
2. Using positive guidance
3. Providing challenging activities built on a child's interests
4. Responding promptly and extending verbal and nonverbal communication
5. "Scaffolding learning," in which an adult supports a child to learn new skills or ideas by providing help until the child understands the idea more deeply or masters the skill

**Developed by the Early Learning Lab, a new venture to design and test innovative strategies for teaching and caregiving for all young children*

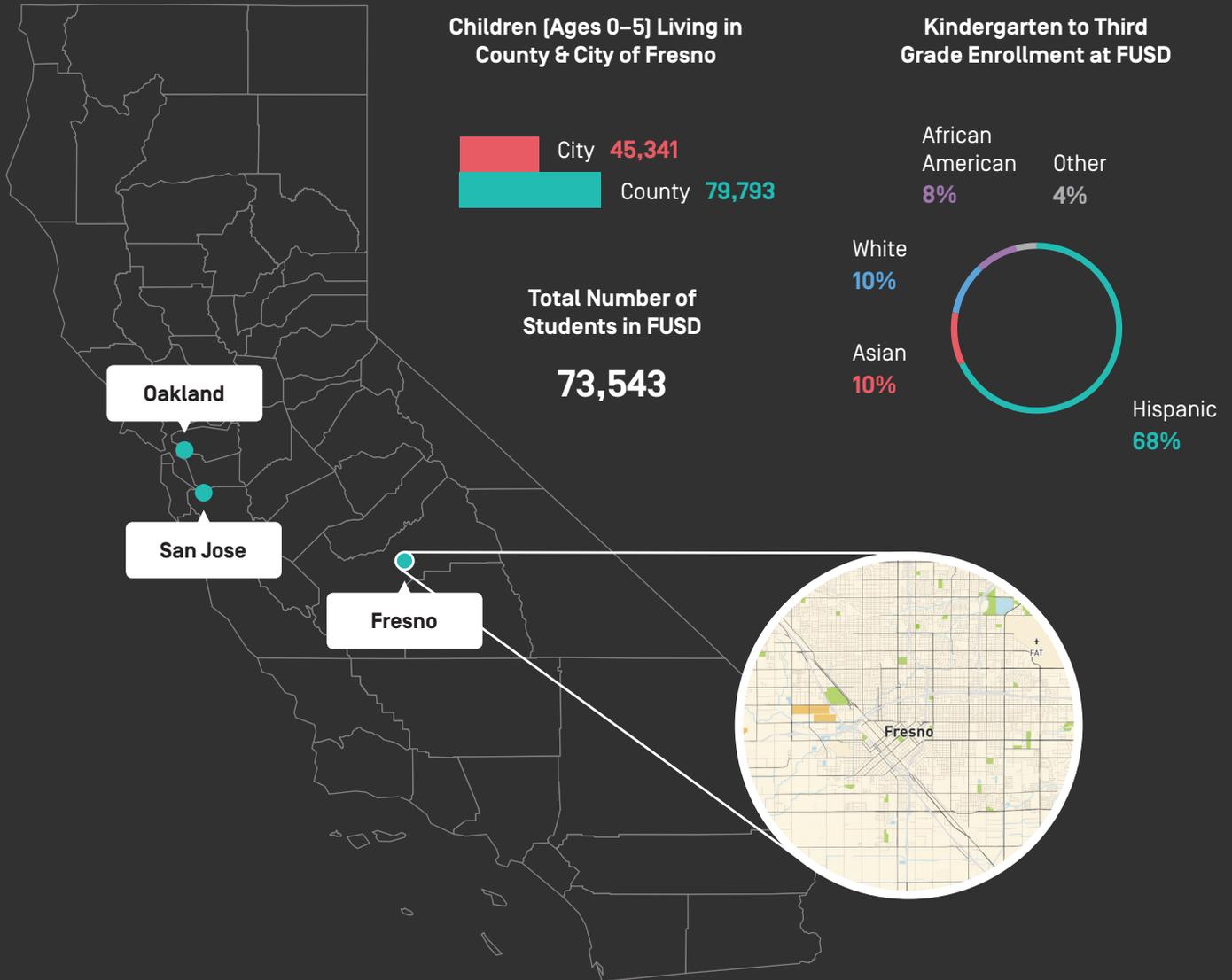
We are going to invest in early learning not just because we are among the poorest cities in the nation, but because it's the right thing to do for young kids.

— Michael E. Hanson, Superintendent, Fresno Unified School District



Ewing Elementary School Dual Immersion Preschool Class
Photo: Fresno Unified Flickr

Who Are Fresno's Young Children? ³



Children (Ages 0–5) in the City of Fresno Living in Poverty



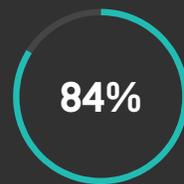
Children Ready for Kindergarten, Per FUSD Assessments



Children in Fresno County Receiving Developmental Screenings



Children in FUSD Who Qualify for Free and Reduced Price Lunch



Innovation: Collaborating to Improve Teaching for Dual Language Learners

Educators in Fresno are working with specialists from the Early Learning Lab, based in Oakland, to design and test innovative strategies for teaching and caregiving in early childhood.

After looking more closely at data on its most vulnerable students, the school district identified English language learning as one of the areas of slowest growth. Administrators were concerned about continued gaps in the language and literacy scores for dual language learners as they moved through the school system.

To fix this problem, educators from FUSD, Head Start, Early Head Start, and the city’s family child care community have come together, along with consultants from the Early Learning Lab and the Packard Foundation, to co-lead a series of monthly collaborative professional development sessions held on Saturdays, designed to improve best practices for Fresno’s dual language learners.

The sessions are based, in part, on research and practices developed by Linda Espinosa, author of *Getting It Right for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds*. Her approach includes a focus on the value of and support for the home language, and getting to know the child and family, as well as strategies teachers can use to support linguistic growth, such as selecting picture books that will be used repetitively to foster vocabulary and concept development.

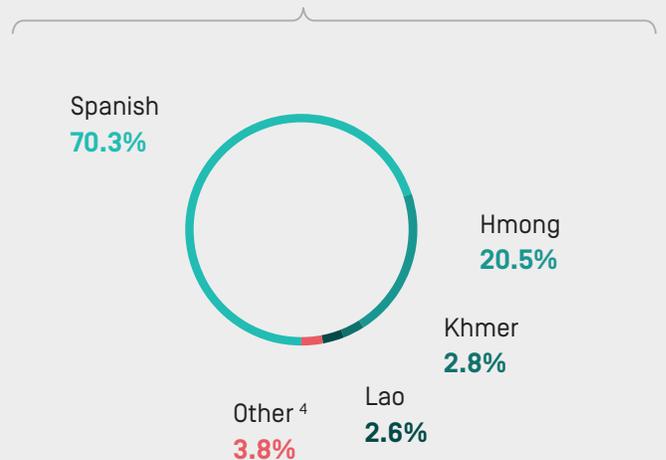
Educational leaders in Fresno hope that this collaboration can begin to build a more seamless network of support for dual language learners across the community. They are quick to point out, though, that this does not mean that everyone has to be doing exactly the same thing. Instead, they say, they are working to ensure that all educators in the community have common values about the kind of support children need, support that can help them thrive as they move from child care into transitional kindergarten and into kindergarten, first grade, and beyond.

Who are Fresno’s Dual Language Learners?



Of FUSD Kindergarteners are Dual Language Learners

In a District Where Children Speak 50+ Different Languages

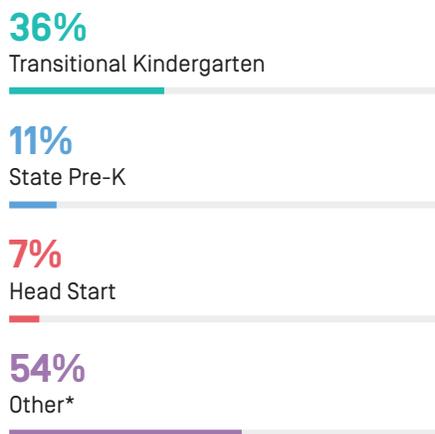


Storey Elementary School Preschool Class
Photo: Fresno Unified Flickr

Where are Fresno's Children? The Early Learning Landscape

As is the case throughout the state and the country, it is difficult to get a clear picture of where all of Fresno's young children are enrolled because there are multiple programs with varying methods for counting whether children are attending and whether they have funding to cover their slots. Some children may be in both a pre-K program (say, for the morning hours) **and** a licensed child care center (in the afternoon). Below is information collected and analyzed by Harder+Company Community Research to help district leaders and others gain a better understanding of which children are being served where. While numbers are not comparable, one can deduce from the data that a fairly high number of Fresno's children are not enrolled in either licensed child care or pre-K.

Publicly-funded programs:⁵ Of kids ages 3 to 5 in Fresno County, fewer than half are in a district-, state-, or federally-funded program.



*These children are either not in care, or in family child care or private school.

Transitional kindergarten: All but two of the 65 FUSD elementary schools currently have TK classrooms.⁶

School district pre-K: 2,492 children as of June 2015.⁷

Licensed child care centers: There are 70 licensed care centers, including state pre-K, Head Start programs, and private centers (some of which take children over the age of 5), in the city of Fresno. There are 298 licensed care centers in Fresno County.⁸ These licensed care centers provide 17,656 total slots for children in Fresno County and 9,363 slots in the city of Fresno.⁹

Parents and informal providers: An undetermined number of children are in unlicensed or home-based programs or are with relatives and parents all day.

A Review of Early Care and Education Programs for Children in California

Throughout the state, children from birth through age five may be eligible for one or several of the following programs; however, often income eligibility, tuition, limited public funding, or wait lists limit their accessibility. For more on statewide programs, see *Not Golden Yet: Building a Stronger Workforce for Young Children in California*.

- Subsidized child care (in centers or home-based), **ages 0–12**
- Early Head Start, **ages 0–3**
- Head Start, **ages 3–5**
- California Preschool Program, **ages 3–4**
- Transitional Kindergarten, **4-year-olds with fall birthdays**

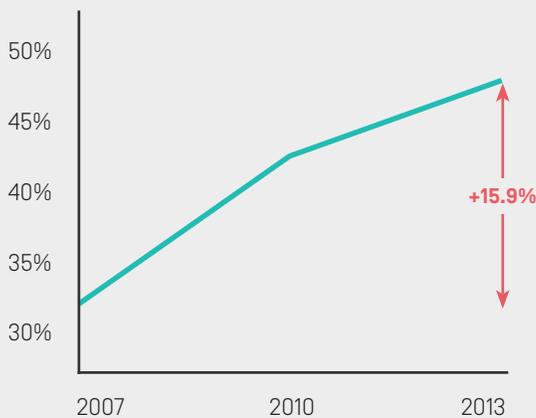
The Early Learning Workforce: Low Wages

In the Fresno metropolitan area, child care workers are paid on average \$10.47 an hour, or \$21,780 per year. Workers in the state preschool program and Head Start fare slightly better, with an average annual salary of \$29,070. Both of these are significantly less than what TK and kindergarten teachers are paid in Fresno, \$64,090 per year on average.¹⁰



Storey Elementary School Preschool Class
Photo: Fresno Unified Flickr

Child Poverty on the Rise in Fresno

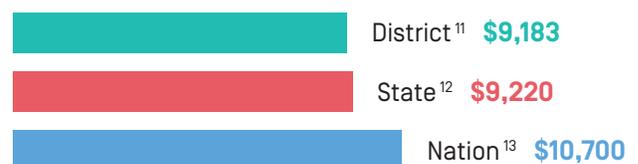


Source: National Center for Children in Poverty, "Researchers: Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Buffalo, Milwaukee Lead Nation in Child Poverty," news release. October 31, 2011. Note that the 2013 percentage here includes all children up to age 18.

Per-Pupil Spending in Fresno

While data do not exist to provide a clear picture of per-pupil spending on children before they reach kindergarten, school budgets give us this snapshot of Fresno's spending on students in public schools:

K-12 Spending



Note that the average per-pupil expenditure in pre-K programs is typically significantly less than the K-12 expenditure, and the length of the school day varies dramatically as well. The most recent data available on the California State Preschool Program, which offers half-day and full-day services, show that the state's expenditure is \$4,298 per child.¹⁴

New Funding to Help Fresno Make Progress

In 2015 Fresno became one of three communities in the Golden State to receive new support through the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Starting Smart and Strong Initiative, a ten-year effort that aims to ensure all children grow up healthy and ready for kindergarten by improving the quality of adult-child interactions across all settings where young children learn and grow. The grants were awarded to the Franklin-McKinley School District in San Jose, the Fresno Unified School District, and the Oakland Unified School District (through the Oakland Public Education Fund). For the first three years the communities are poised to receive grants of up to \$500,000 each year, to help pay for professional development and training for early childhood educators, support for informal care providers (family, friends, and neighbors who are not licensed), and collaborations between public and private systems to support young children, as well as planning and technical assistance.

The initiative's core partners include, but are not limited to: Central Valley Children's Services Network, Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission, Fresno County Office of Education, Fresno Housing Authority, Fresno Unified School District, and First 5 Fresno County.

Before, we were knocking on doors to try to get people to even understand why this was important. Now people are knocking on our doors asking how they can partner.

— Lupe Jaime, Director, Early Care & Education, Fresno County Office of Education

Stronger Teaching and Caregiving For all young children by

2025



Over the next several years, New America will be reporting on what it takes to provide adults with the preparation and training they need to ensure that all young children in California learn and thrive.

**For more on this project, see
EdCentral.org/California.**

Notes

¹ Hannah Furfaro, "A Push to Educate Children in Their Earliest Years Attracts Attention, Money," *Fresno Bee*, September 19, 2014.

² National Center for Children in Poverty, "Child Poverty Pervasive in Large American Cities, New Census Data Show," news release, December 2014.

³ Harder + Company Community Research analysis of: American Community Survey, KidsCount Data Center, California Department of Education (2014–15), Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (2013), District at a Glance Fact Sheet, Fresno Unified School District (2015), and California Health Interview Survey (2007).

⁴ Figures from 2008. See Fresno Unified School District, "English Learners Task Force," May 27, 2009, English Learners Task Force.

⁵ Analysis by Harder + Company Community Research.

⁶ Deanna Mathies (Fresno Unified School District), interview with author, December 2, 2015.

⁷ "District at a Glance Fact Sheet," Fresno Unified School District.

⁸ Mirna Len (Central Valley Children's Services Network), e-mail interview with author, November 11, 2015.

⁹ California Child Care Resource & Referral Network.

¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics. Workers in the state preschool program and Head Start are most likely classified as pre-K teachers in the BLS data.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Public Education Finances (2013).

¹² "Education Spending Per Student by State," *Governing* analysis of U.S. Census Data.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ W. Steven Barnett, Megan E. Carolan, James H. Squires, Kirsty Clarke Brown, and Michelle Horowitz, *The State of Preschool 2014: State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2015).

This profile was written by Sarah Jackson and her California team at HiredPen, a communications firm with an office in the Bay Area working with New America's Early and Elementary Education Policy team. New America received funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to publish these briefs and to enable New America's analysts and writers to continue reporting on California and national policies related to the early learning workforce.



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Ewing Elementary School Dual Immersion Preschool Class
Photo: Fresno Unified Flickr