Oakland is one of California’s largest cities. The birthplace of the Black Panthers and one of the nation’s African American centers for over a century, issues of race and equality are still very present here. Today, Oakland is home to middle-class and working-class black families and an immigrant community from Asia and Latin America; more than 80 languages are spoken throughout the city. There is a 15-year difference in life expectancy between a white child born in the city’s affluent Oakland Hills and an African American child born in the low-income neighborhoods in East Oakland.¹ The city boasts an activist population and a strong connection to labor unions, and real progressive change, say those who know the city well, must come from the ground up.

In the past few years, new tech companies like Pandora and Uber and their workers have begun to relocate across the bay from San Francisco and Silicon Valley into less-expensive Oakland. This has caused rents to rise rapidly, displacing many of the city’s poor and working-class residents. Teachers are in short supply and the school district is considering a plan to build below-market rental housing for city teachers.² Educators and care providers in Oakland have struggled for years to adequately serve the large number of young children who are living in poverty, as evidenced by the Panthers’ Free Breakfast for School Children Program, started in 1969.

Child care centers fought to keep their doors open during the Great Recession, when state budget cuts reduced the number of subsidized child care and pre-K slots by nearly

¹New America uses the term pre-K to include all learning settings for children ages 3 and 4.
For years, the early childhood program within the Oakland Unified School District functioned as an “island,” separate from the rest of OUSD, and was known as the weak link in the city’s early childhood programming.

In 2009, after years of state control and struggle, the school board regained its power. And with new local leadership it embarked on a robust community engagement process. A new strategic plan includes a cradle-to-career vision and lays out early childhood as a key component of the district’s future priorities. OUSD has become a full-service community school district with an emphasis on partnering across systems and organizations in the city to provide wrap-around services for Oakland’s children in order to address multiple needs and deep disparities.

And more change is coming. With new investments from the Packard Foundation that build on these partnerships, and national attention on the state of the early childhood workforce brought by the landmark Transforming the Workforce study from the Institutes of Medicine, Oakland is poised to begin a ten-year strategy that aims to create universal access to high-quality early learning for children throughout the city. The school district hired a deputy chief of early learning, a new position. And leaders have created a collaborative structure to enable cross-sector participation, including funders, advocates, service providers, and OUSD district staff, all of whom are working together to develop a system of care for children who live in Oakland.

We’ve got new leadership. We’ve got people working together. We’ve got some early wins. People feel like it’s a new day in this whole sector.

— Curtiss Sarikey, Associate Superintendent/Deputy Chief, Oakland Unified School District

Supporting Adults to Support Children

By the end of 2015, Oakland Unified and its partners were working to:

- Link early childhood programming to its Community Schools Framework
- Create a new family resource center network
- Adopt “Big Day for Pre-K,” a new early childhood curriculum, plus coaching for implementation
- Expand transitional kindergarten to 43 elementary schools
- Launch a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) across all sites
- Pilot developmental screenings
- Pilot and launch the Early Development Instrument (EDI)
- Foster collaborations between its Early Childhood Education program and Oakland Head Start
- Map the landscape of the city’s informal care network
Who Are Oakland’s Young Children? 4

Children (Ages 0–5) Living in the County of Alameda and the City of Oakland
- City: 25,969
- County: 97,652

Percentage of Children Who Are Dual Language Learners
- Kindergartners: 42%
- 3rd Graders: 46%

Kindergarten to Third Grade Enrollment in OUSD
- Hispanic: 43%
- African American: 26%
- White: 12%
- Asian: 12%
- Other: 7%
- Hispanic: 43%

Children (Ages 0–5) in the City of Oakland Living in Poverty: 25%

Children Ready for Kindergarten, Per OUSD Assessments: 40%

Children in Alameda County Receiving Developmental Screenings: 27%
Innovation: Getting Young African American Boys Ready for Kindergarten

African American children face vast disparities in achievement compared to their white peers within the Oakland Unified School District. Over the last three years, for example, 30 percent of African American third graders were proficient in reading, as compared to 78 percent of white students. Boys particularly face disproportionate rates of suspension and placement in special education services. In 2010, the district launched the Office of African American Male Achievement to help improve outcomes for black students in middle and high school, and now elementary school. This year, with support from the Hellman Foundation, the district will pilot a program designed to reach African American boys before they enter kindergarten. The two-year initiative will target approximately 50 boys at two child development centers and it will focus on reducing achievement gaps and the effects of trauma on early childhood. The program will include mental and behavioral support for children and families in addition to professional development in trauma-informed practices for teachers.

Putting an End to Preschool Suspensions

Oakland’s efforts to support African American boys aligns with a movement across the country to ensure that early educators have the tools and training they need to respond appropriately to different behaviors in the classroom. Nationally, African American boys account for 18 percent of pre-K children, but represent 42 percent of pre-K children students suspended at least once a year. Experts say that without appropriate supports, developmental issues often get ascribed to behavior. Earlier intervention can help assure that these children get the support they need from day one to assure a better transition to kindergarten.
Where Are Oakland’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 Oakland’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 the research firm 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 Oakland’s children are not enrolled in either licensed child care or pre-K.

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

- 31% Transitional Kindergarten/Kindergarten
- 9% State Pre-K
- 5% Head Start
- 55% Other*

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

Licensed child care centers: There are 157 licensed child care centers in Oakland, which include state preschool, Head Start programs, and private centers (some of which take children over the age of 5). These centers provide 10,962 total early care slots.

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 state 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

Transitional kindergarten: By March 2016, 43 OUSD elementary schools had TK or TK/K split classrooms.

School district pre-K: There are 1,460 children as of March 2016.
Per-Pupil Spending in Oakland

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 Oakland’s spending on students in public schools:

K–12 Spending:

- District $10,958
- State $9,220
- Nation $10,700

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 per child is $4,298.15

The Early Learning Workforce: Low Wages

In the Oakland metropolitan area, child care workers are paid on average $11.58 an hour, or $24,090 per year. Workers in the state pre-K program and Head Start fare only slightly better, with an average annual salary of $36,090. Both of these are significantly less than what TK and kindergarten teachers are paid in Oakland, $61,730 per year on average.11

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 per child is $4,298.15

Oakland is at a tipping point to dramatically improve early childhood across the city. We need to fully engage and move toward action to create a robust quality early childhood program that serves all students and families.

— Ray Mondragon, deputy chief of early learning, OUSD

Photo: Hasain Rasheed for the Oakland Public Education Fund
New Funding to Help Oakland Make Progress

In 2015 Oakland 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.

In Oakland, the initiative’s core partners include, but are not limited to: Alameda County Early Care and Education Planning Council, BANANAS, Inc., California Child Care Coordinators Association, City of Oakland–Department of Human Services, City of Oakland–Head Start, City of Oakland–Office of the Mayor, Early Edge California, First 5 of Alameda County, Kenneth Rainin Foundation, Lotus Bloom, Mills College School of Education, Oakland Public Education Fund, Oakland Unified School District, University of California, and Alameda County Health Care Services Agency/Behavioral Health Care Services.

In order to create equitable outcomes where all students receive a high-quality education and reach their full potential, we must invest heavily in young children.

— Antwan Wilson, superintendent, OUSD

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 Alameda County Public Health Department, *Life and Death from Unnatural Causes: Health and Social Inequality in Alameda County*, 2008.


3 Kristin Schumacher, *Five Things You Need to Know About California’s Child Care and Development System*, presentation slides, California Budget Project, 2015.


8 Personal correspondence with Curtiss Sarkey, March 9, 2016.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Bureau of Labor Statistics. Workers in the state preschool program are most likely classified as Pre-K teachers in the BLS data.


14 Ibid.


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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