

The Pre-Eminence of California's Community College Early Childhood Education Workforce Instruction Threatened by Funding Cuts

*A Joint Statement by the California Community College Early Childhood Educators (CCCECE) and
Early Childhood Professional Development and Education Collaborative (EPEC)*

Child Development Workforce Training in Jeopardy

In this paper, the California Community College Early Childhood Educators (CCCECE) and the Early Childhood Professional Development and Education Collaborative (EPEC) outline the effects state budget cuts are having on ECE/CD departments, campus lab schools and child care centers, and students, as well as outlining the current strengths of the community college early education system. For decades California's Community College Early Childhood Education/Child Development Departments have been the backbone of workforce education for those who teach and care for California's youngest learners. Currently 103 campuses in the system offer classes, certificates, and/or degrees in ECE. Approximately 98 of them have lab schools or campus children's centers. Child development programs have been so successful that they are now California's largest discipline for issuing career certificates and rank as the second largest for total credit awards (certificates and degrees combined). Courses are designed and taught by highly qualified faculty who work diligently to help students to bridge the world of child development theory and best practices with the workforce needs and experiences of students. Unfortunately, community college Early Childhood Education/Child Development departments and students are in crisis as state budget cuts and rising student fees are placing the foundation of early childhood workforce preparation in jeopardy.

Community college child development departments, which have provided the bedrock for California's ECE workforce training, are at great risk. The current budget crisis has caused colleges across the state to significantly alter how they can provide high-quality, timely educational experiences to students. It is both ironic and sad that while the state has turned significantly to community college ECE departments as the core of its workforce training it has, at the same time, reduced the viability of those programs.

First, budget reductions have drastically reduced the number of classes community colleges can offer. CCCECE is currently surveying the field to measure the impact of these cuts, but are already hearing that departments have cut their course offerings by 20-35% or more. This, of course, is making it very difficult for students to continue on their educational and career pathways in a timely way: on the first day of the semester many

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students who were not able to enroll show up hoping to find a class only to be turned away. Notably, child development departments have had to cut identified “stand-alone” classes, i.e. classes that are in addition to the core curriculum (Curriculum Alignment Project or CAP) for a degree or a certificate. Secondary curriculum classes such as Art or Music or Science for Young Children, short courses that focus on specific topics, such as working with parents, the classroom environment, etc. are scarce. These classes give students information about curriculum and other content areas that they can implement immediately when they return to their worksite the next day. In some districts even the core classes have been put on rotation, thus delaying students’ completion of their degree or certificates.

Second, and perhaps more profoundly, the severe underfunding exacerbated by the current budget crisis threatens the existence of the campus lab schools/children’s centers. The supervised field experience course is an essential and critical component of a course of study in child development/ECE. In virtually all districts the practicum experience serves as the capstone class in Child Development majors and certificates. Supervised field experience is a mandatory component of both the Child Development Transfer Major course sequence and the system-wide Curriculum Alignment Project. In the Transfer Major Curriculum the practicum course description states,

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“In this course, the student will practice and demonstrate developmentally appropriate early childhood program planning and teaching competencies under the supervision of early childhood education/child development faculty and other qualified early education professional. Students will utilize practical classroom experiences to make connections between theory and practice, develop professional behaviors, and build a comprehensive understanding of children and families. Child-centered, play-oriented approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment and knowledge of curriculum content areas will be emphasized as student teachers design, implement, and evaluate experiences that promote positive development and learning for all young children.”

Most of the child development programs in California’s community colleges have an integrated child development center. As lab schools they provide a high quality, supervised teaching experience for California’s student early childhood educators and they also provide high quality early care and education for children of students attending the college. This care allows low-income parents to enroll in classes in all disciplines and complete their educational goals. Without these vital programs student-parents (especially women) will face significant barriers to their achieving their vocational and educational goals, including earned degrees and certificates.

Currently we know of a half dozen campus lab schools that have closed or will close at the end of the 2011-12 academic year. For example in the Santa Clara area alone it seems likely that there could be only three lab schools remaining next year where there have been six. Throughout the state most of the lab schools have downsized or closed classrooms. Usually because of their high cost the infant and toddler rooms are targeted first, so practicum experiences in infant toddler labs are vanishing. This has resulted in fewer opportunities for students to complete their studies and earn their degrees or certificates. The California Community College Early Childhood Educators (CCCECE) is currently preparing a survey to determine more precisely the extent of the cuts across the state.

However, if current trends persist the early childhood education/child development departments will no longer have an on-campus model program strongly linked to their department where their students may fulfill the required course work.

At a time when all programs are vulnerable the lab schools stand out because of their susceptibility to California's current budget crisis. Essentially, there is no uniform mode of funding these essential schools. Most receive subsidies from CDD California State Department of Education's Child Development Division (CDD) at the standard reimbursement, a rate at which not-for-profit providers struggle to provide any services even in the best of times. Campus lab schools have never been able to function on that allotment because of the higher costs associated with staff that earn decent salaries, have acceptable benefits packages and are of very high quality. Additionally there are extra staff costs because of the need to mentor students and provide for interns. Further cuts from CDD are expected in 2012.

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Many lab schools have also received cuts from their own districts. The lab schools although asked to serve two functions, are not being funded adequately for either one and are being squeezed financially from two sides. Already the practicum opportunity for students has begun to disappear and many families have had to forgo their education because of the lack of quality care for their children while they take classes, study and work.

If the lab schools disappear, programs in the community will be negatively impacted. While it may seem that a solution would be to place students in the community, college programs uniquely are designed to address the following issues:

- Community college child development classrooms are designed to accommodate extra adults (students) in the environment without disrupting children's activities.
- Most community college child development classrooms have observation rooms where students can unobtrusively view teacher/child interactions and behavior.
- Community college child development teachers are trained and paid to guide students as they learn their profession.
- Community college child development classrooms are staffed to handle the influx of calls and emails from students needing to schedule and change appointments for completion of assignments.
- Community college child development classrooms allow for students to learn their profession with a consistent pedagogy that reflects current research and state initiatives.
- Faculty would be asked to supervise students in a wide variety of programs at scattered geographically throughout an area. Supervision time of the faculty member would be limited for visiting students at their placement sites because of the additional travel time.

The California Early Childhood Mentor Program (CECMP), which has allowed colleges to work with high quality community programs as practicum sites, has been asked to step up and fill the gap left by closed and downsized lab schools. Unfortunately, its funding too has been cut back and is in

jeopardy, thus putting at risk another opportunity for students to complete their supervised field experience. The CECMP was always designed to build off of the existing the community college lab schools and does not have the capacity to serve as a replacement.

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Students face many barriers in addition to the loss of practicum opportunities. By next summer **tuition will increase** to \$46 per unit up from \$13 per unit just a few years ago. Classes that cost students less than \$50 will soon cost nearly \$150. **Textbook costs** have also risen and it's not uncommon to see basic Child Growth and Development texts costing \$130 or more.

Additionally, on every campus **access to counselors** who can help students plan a successful educational pathway has been scaled back. As a result, some students are not getting assessed and are entering classes that demand writing and reading skills beyond their capability. Others sometimes enroll in courses that they do not need, which cost them both in time and money.

Strengths of the California Community College Early Childhood Education System

Child development departments have, in many ways, provided significant leadership to the community college system as a whole. Notably the six-year efforts of the ECE **Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP)** created a model for other disciplines in determining universally accepted core courses and curriculum by all participating colleges. Originally motivated by impending legislation (Proposition 82) that would have provided preschool for all of California's four-year olds, community college faculty took the initiative to work on a shared core of courses for entry-level professionals. These discussions led to a formal recommendation to develop coursework that maintained the unique qualities of the profession while improving the teaching and care practices for young children in California. ECE/CD Faculty from Community Colleges and California State Universities joined together to develop the competency-based courses. The resulting CAP Lower Division 8 was developed as a shared and essential portion of a lower division program of study. It should be noted that a supervised field experience in a high quality lab school or other qualified program was set as the capstone class.

CAP has been so successful that it was used as a model of transferability and cooperation between the CSU and CCC systems when SB1440 was drafted. This bill went into effect in spring 2011 and calls for streamlined Associate of Science/Arts majors (Transfer Model Curriculum) in many disciplines that consist of sixty lower division units to be combined with sixty upper division units for the baccalaureate degree. When the two academic senates created the workgroup to develop the degree pathway for child development, they adopted the CAP requirements virtually wholesale as the lower division discipline courses. Additionally, when the **Early Learning Quality Improvement System** task force made its final recommendations to the legislature in the winter of 2010, it based its recommended foundational coursework for the EC workforce on the CAP requirements. California was recently awarded a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant and portions of these funds are earmarked to add an additional three courses to the Curriculum Alignment Project.

Another area where community college child development departments have provided leadership within the CCC system is in providing workforce education to those not yet fluent in English. Recognizing the change in California's demographics, many child development departments around the state have crafted special programs to educate early childhood teachers who are learning English. This has led to the implementation of cohort groups, teaching in other languages and the creation of vocational ESL. Child Development is the only discipline to address the needs of this special population with such intensity.

Unique support systems help ensure community college child development student success. For nearly 25 years the Child Development Training Consortium has offered a myriad of services at virtually all campuses that include funding book loans, tuition and parking reimbursements, financial support for child development permit applications and other services. Additionally, The California Early Childhood Mentor Program has supported child development departments to identify high quality programs in the community and to educate teachers to provide appropriate supervision to students placed at their site. With the Mentor Program's support child development departments sponsor ongoing local seminars for designated mentor teachers and center directors that provide leadership in the early childhood community.

Child development departments have successfully made their classes accessible to students throughout California. As noted, there are numerous programs for students who are learning English. Each year community college child development departments offer hundreds of classes online that allow students to have some control over their study/class time and bring the courses to them no matter where they are located in the state. It is also the norm for these departments to offer classes in a variety of locations, during the evenings and on weekends.

Impact On Our Youngest Citizens

Unfortunately all of this is in jeopardy. The cuts are putting community college child development programs, and especially the lab schools, in an untenable and unsustainable position. Practitioners, advocates, and policy makers must address the impact on training highly qualified educators to teach and care for the youngest children. We must develop a new system of funding our lab schools that provides for optimal learning environments for the college students and the children and families enrolled. The impact of these programs on our communities and specifically on our public education system will be profound. Our youngest citizens deserve no less.

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