

Region 9 Episode

Guests: Kris Perry and Lupe Jaime-Mileham

Narrator

Welcome to Early Childhood Policy Matters, a podcast for early childhood professionals and strategic partners hoping to use research to inform policy and better serve children, families and their communities. Today we continue our regional story series, looking at the innovative work being done in states and communities across the country with support from the Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five initiative. Host Howard Morrison takes us to California and sits down with early childhood leaders, Kris Perry and Lupe Jaime-Mileham, that's right now on Early Childhood Policy Matters.

Howard Morrison:

Hello and welcome to Early Childhood Policy Matters. I'm Howard Morrison, Early Childhood Technical Assistance Specialist at the PDG B-5 technical assistance center with SRI Education.

In 2019, California passed the state budget calling for the creation of a new master plan for early learning and care. It built on the state's initial PDG B-5 strategic plan and was designed to serve as a long-term roadmap for building a comprehensive, high quality and affordable childcare and preschool system for children from birth to 12 with a particular focus on early childhood. Working through the pandemic, state leaders completed the master plan and published it at the end of 2020.

Kris Perry:

We were able to include in-depth research and we were able to even with the pandemic engage stakeholders over many, many months in developing the plan that really built on the PDG-I strategic plan and needs assessment. So the master plan for early learning and care was possible in many ways because of PDG-I. But more importantly, it built on a tradition in California of creating master plans for education. We just hadn't had the opportunity to do that for early education yet, and now we have it and we're already implementing portions of it.

Howard Morrison:

That's Kris Perry, Deputy Secretary for Early Childhood Development with the California Health and Human Services Agency and senior advisor to Governor Gavin Newsom. She helped lead the creation of the master plan with support from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five initiative or PDG B-5 and by building on the state's 2019 Blue Ribbon Commission report in a previous state-wide strategic plan.

Kris Perry:

For example, the PDG-I strategic plan recommended the development of a cost model and fiscal framework to outline options to support the funding and revenue necessary to build an equitable, comprehensive early learning and care system. The master plan developed the fiscal framework to guide state implementation and we know how important implementation is. There's really no point in creating plans if you're not going to implement the recommendations within them.

So the PDG-I strategic plan also recommended funding neutral strategies to create efficiencies and eliminate barriers that we know impede access, which includes everything from needing to streamline our contracting processes and applications for services and aligning our eligibility requirements across programs. So California really looked not only at how to increase our

reimbursement in our supportive providers, but also how could we improve the way we're administering the program within this master plan, knowing that all of these things have to work together.

Howard Morrison:

Lupe Jaime-Mileham, Deputy Director for the Childcare and Development Division at the California Department of Social Services, says the master plan comes at a vital time for the state's children, families, and communities.

Lupe Jaime-Mileham:

For decades, right, researchers, policymakers, practitioners and families have described the needs, challenges and opportunities for expanding and enhancing the California early childhood learning and care system. These investments made through the Newsom administration allowed California to elevate prior wisdom to investigate systemic barriers and also develop a range of recommendations that are fundamentally redesigned California's early learning and care system. He set in motion the investment and research, attention to policy and call into action a plan for the future that provides the youngest amongst us with a great start in life. This also includes early in care opportunities that put young children in a directory that eliminates future gaps and outcomes and provides families with the option for care that aligns to their needs and preferences for children and families. But most importantly, the master plan advances Governor Newsom's commitment for long-term vision to building a universal preschool system and a comprehensive quality and affordable childcare system for California

Howard Morrison:

After decades of discussion about the needs of California's children, families and communities, the master plan gives stakeholders a path to take action.

Kris Perry:

Investments made in California over the last several years under the Newsom administration demonstrate the state's strong commitment to meeting the needs of all California families. This includes investments to advance the healthy development of children as well as their early learning and care needs and the opportunity to provide all families with options for care that meet the needs of their children and eliminates the sort of future gaps in education, health and life outcomes that we have been concerned about for a long time.

The master plan presented the unique opportunity to be boldly pragmatic and we could do that under the Newsom administration given his commitment to early education. This allowed us to essentially create a blueprint for the future that reflects insights from research, planning and advocacy while attending to the significant structural definition and changes necessary to build forward with efficiency, efficacy and fiscal sustainability.

So the master plan really helped us elevate the existing system through intentional design and actions that address family's unmet needs and lift up the priorities captured by the assembly Blue Ribbon Commission report and the Preschool Development Grant Strategic Plan as the fundamental building blocks for creating a system for all of California's children, delivering on the expectation and promise of a California for all.

Howard Morrison:

The plan directly addresses a number of state early childhood priorities, including equitable access, generational impacts and family-centered design.

Kris Perry:

So the key priorities included, number one, equity, which is essentially targeted universalism and how we achieve that by confronting segregation of opportunity that currently exists and supporting early exposure to diversity and honoring and celebrating linguistic diversity and ensuring early learning and care environments provide accommodations for children with disabilities.

Our second commitment was to a two-generation system. We are honoring and supporting families as partners, caregivers. We're recognizing that families require stable employment with living wages, access to affordable housing and supportive and healthy communities. Employing strategies such as paid family leave or multi-generational care environments that utilize the wisdom and time of grandparents and seniors are just a few of the examples of our two-generation commitment.

The third major priority area is a family-centered design system and a system that is designed with the expectation that families have a positive experience where their needs for care and support are met. The architecture of the system should reflect interconnections that follow an efficient and clear path for navigation by families. This requires a deliberately empathetic design organized with a child-centered, family-friendly perspective.

So in summary, Howard, we put the priorities of the administration directly into the master plan for early learning and care, and then develop specific recommendations for how that would look when we implement the plan, as well as how we would eventually afford or finance the plan over 10 years.

Howard Morrison:

In just a short time since its inception, the master plan has already begun to show real-world impacts across the golden state. It has evolved to account for the challenges and limitations exposed by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Kris Perry:

Well, when we started the master plan in November of 2019, we saw a system that was ready to grow and improve and we understood needs as they existed. But then COVID-19 hit and the pandemic really put an unbelievable amount of pressure on our state and really in some ways shone a brighter light on the cracks in our system. The cracks showed us how equity remains to be a significant challenge, for example, with the impact of job loss and childcare access disproportionately affecting our low-income communities.

In 2020, which was also a difficult time to be a parent or a provider, we felt that we still needed to move ahead with the plan. In fact, there was an opportunity to receive additional support and the more we were prepared and had planned for what we wanted to do, the better. So we met the mandate of the legislature for the plan of researching the five areas that had been outlined in Trailer Bill, which here is how we articulate our goals through legislation and those five areas were access, quality, universal pre-K, facilities and finance. But we also articulated a set of action steps to help us build back the early learning and care system over the next 10 years.

So essentially the master plan helped California do what others thought was impossible, especially in the midst of a pandemic. It helped us to outline the recommendations we wanted to help us provide relief to parents who need to care for their children, provide stability to providers and it

helped us to in a sense think and reimagine an early learning and care system that had been really devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. And through this latest legislative cycle that we're just now beginning again, we can still see evidence that the master plan recommendations are coming to life. We are looking at how to provide comprehensive early learning and care for infants and toddlers. We're looking at how families can get access to high-quality care and get their needs met. We're still working through how to improve school readiness through universal preschool.

Finally, we're really looking at how to grow the quality, size and stability of the early learning and care workforce who are essential, essentially the backbone of the system here.

Howard Morrison:

Kris, Lupe and others are now looking ahead, working on implementing the master plan and ensuring that it translates into quantifiable improvements for California's children and families.

Kris Perry:

The master plan outlines a 10-year roadmap that reflects a truly mixed delivery system. As such, the master plan's implementation is a collaborative effort between the legislature, state agencies and local organizations. Over the last year, the master plan has received significant attention from state-level decision makers for lots of reasons. Several budget and legislative proposals have been introduced that will help us to advance the master plan's recommendations, including bills to implement universal preschool, investments in childcare facilities and professional development, and associated supports for the early childhood workforce.

Lupe Jaime-Mileham:

Yeah, and also just wanted to provide an example of what we're currently working on. So, the Early Childhood and Development Act of 2020 authorized the transition of early learning and care programs from the California Department of Education to the California Department of Social Services. This transition serves as one of the earliest and most significant implementation milestones of the master plan. The transition of these programs support a more equitable accessible for childcare and development delivery systems that reduces duplications and systemic barriers and enables the state to structure a family outcome focused on service delivery.

Also, over this last year, CDSS has outlined and initiated implementation of the transition plan that aligns to the four goals of the master plan. And so these goals are programs, workforce, funding, and governance in administration. Also want to highlight that the transition plan provides a framework for CDSS to realize that the vision of an integrated, coordinated childcare and development system designed to equitably serve California's children and their families while intentionally supporting their needs in an effort to stimulate a legacy of resilience and security for the current and future generation.

Part of the transition also implements addressing data. In terms of data, we really want to know who is accessing our service, who is not accessing our service and why not. The data landscape will really center families and their children and then this first phase, the implementation has and continues to be informed by extensive stakeholder feedback. Just want to highlight that this feedback consists of families, providers, advocates and contractors, for example, just to name a few. But these perspectives are vital contributions to the implementation of the master plan as well as this new division.

Howard Morrison :

In the years ahead, state leaders believe the master plan will have a meaningful and lasting impact and the children, families and future generations they serve and create a comprehensive, high-quality early childhood mixed delivery system in California.

Kris Perry:

Of course, this is, in fact, our largest, most overarching goal. As Californians, we share a vision that young children thrive physically, emotionally and educationally in the early years with equitable access to child and family-centered services that support healthy child development. So to be successful, California's mixed delivery system must address inequities and disproportionalities, and it must employ approaches to services that address the needs of the whole child and whole family together.

So really the master plan has helped California in supporting our vision that families deserve to be at the center of our system and that we want to uplift our youngest and most vulnerable populations through a comprehensive network of supports or, as many people like to say, through a mixed delivery system.

Howard Morrison:

Our guests today, once again, were Kris Perry and Lupe Jaime-Mileham. Thank you both for joining us.

Kris Perry:

Thanks, Howard.

Lupe Jaime-Mileham:

Thank you, Howard.

Narrator:

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