**California Department of Education**

# Report to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, the Legislature, and the Department of Finance

**Proposed Tools and Process for the Early Identification of Developmental Delays and Learning Disabilities**



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**Early Education Division**

**Opportunities for All Branch**

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*Description*: Proposed tools and process for early identification of children at risk for developmental delays and learning disabilities.

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## Executive Summary

This report provides a means to identify proposed tools and a process for the early identification of children between two and six years of age at risk for developmental delays or learning disabilities. Per *Education Code* (*EC*) Section 8490 the California Department of Education (CDE) is to provide recommendations for 1) the early identification, 2) further evaluation, 3) support, 4) remediation, and 5) additional referrals as necessary for children at risk for developmental delays or learning disabilities, including but not limited to dyslexia and other literacy delays. The Budget Act of 2022 appropriated $2 million dollars for this work.

The report includes an approach that leverages California’s existing efforts for identifying developmental delays. The tool recommended for developmental screening is the existing and widely utilized Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)-3. The CDE will use the $2 million dollars to support expanded use of the ASQ-3 and accompanying ASQ Online for those California State Preschool Program (CSPP) sites that have not yet started using the questionnaires to identify developmental delays. These sites may need resources in additional languages, or access to the ASQ Online to support the commitment of *EC* Section 8490 for the identification of developmental delays for California’s young learners. The CDE will identify and collaborate with a Quality Counts California (QCC) lead agency which is a county office of education to support this expansion of the ASQ within CSPPs. Determining local needs, ensuring support is equitably considered, working through logistics for distribution, and training on the tool are tasks the CDE is working to determine.

This report will not include a recommendation for literacy screening; pursuant to Education Code Section 53008, the Reading Difficulties Risk Screener Selection Panel is charged with identifying instruments to screen all students in kindergarten through second grade for risk of reading difficulties. The Panel is required to identify a list of screening instruments by December 31, 2024, and local educational agencies are required to implement those screening tools beginning in the 2025–26 school year. This report defers to the Panel to identify appropriate reading screening instruments for kindergarten through second grade.

Additional recommendations in this report include further and ongoing investments dedicated to the supply of the early identification tools and the training and technical assistance needed to support the implementation of those tools. In addition, through the request of employing reading specialists and literacy coaches in early education, the CDE encourages efforts for continued alignment in policies, structure, instructional content, and family involvement from prekindergarten (PreK) into the early grades and beyond.

You can find this report at the CDE Early Education Division’s Laws, Regulations, & Requirements web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/lr/>. If you have questions or need a copy of this report, please contact Kim Taniguchi, Child Development Consultant, Early Education Division, at ktaniguchi@cde.ca.gov.

## Background

### Authorization

The Budget Act of 2022–23 added *Education Code* (*EC*) Section 8490*.* This statute requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop and submit a report to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, appropriate policy committees of the Legislature, and the Department of Finance that identifies the process and tools pursuant to the legislation; provides the evidence required pursuant to this legislation; and provides recommendations to align local practices and implementation.

The above-referenced process and tools are for the 1) early identification, 2) further evaluation, 3) support, 4) remediation, and 5) additional referrals as necessary for children at risk for developmental delays or learning disabilities including but not limited to dyslexia and other literacy delays. *EC* Section 8490 requires that these processes and tools for use in CSPPs, transitional kindergarten (TK), and kindergarten (K) be valid and reliable (as they are customarily understood in research), available and appropriate for use statewide, and must include communication approaches with parents and guardians to foster a supportive learning environment at home.

#### Screening for Risk of Reading Difficulties

The following year, [Senate Bill (SB) 114](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240SB114) (Chapter 48, Statutes of 2023) codified *EC* Section 53008, which tasked the State Board of Education (SBE) with appointing an independent panel of experts- (known as the Reading Difficulties Risk Screener Selection Panel), on or before January 31, 2024, for the purpose of creating an approved list of evidence-based, culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate screening instruments for pupils in K and grades one and two to assess pupils for risk of reading difficulties, including possible neurological disorders such as dyslexia, and to establish a review process and criteria for the panel to use when evaluating and approving the screening instruments. The panel of experts is required by law to also identify information about the appropriate administration of each screening instrument, including the appropriate grade or grades for administration of each screening instrument. On or before June 30, 2025, SB 114 requires the governing board or body of a local educational agency (LEA) toadopt one or more screening instruments from the list adopted to assess pupils for risk of reading difficulties. Commencing no later than the 2025–26 school year, and annually thereafter, LEAs are then required to assess each pupil in grades K–2 for risk of reading difficulties using the screening instrument or instruments adopted by the governing board or body of the LEA unless the pupil’s parent or guardian opts out of the screening in writing.

This literacy screening work is just getting underway and is aligned with the charge of *EC* Section 8490. This effort focuses on children in grades K–2 and consequently excludes TK and CSPP within its charge. In addition, this effort does not include early interventions or screening for developmental delays pursuant to Part B of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as listed within this statute.

However, given the overlap between *EC* Sections 8490 and 53008 to identify literacy screening instruments, this report defers to the Panel to identify appropriate reading screening instruments for kindergarten through second grade.

In addition, while the CDE’s Early Education Division (EED) has identified a tool and a process as required, the CDE does not currently have the legal authority to require TK and K programs to use these tools and processes. The CDE EED does have sufficient authority to require use in CSPPs, in line with *EC* Section 8490. The CDE will prioritize making these processes and tools accessible for local practices and implementation.

Centering diversity, equity, and inclusion responsibly requires that we understand the fluidity of these categories and the systemic issues that arise as a result. Approaches to thinking about and addressing issues in inclusion will always remain in an iterative state as new developments in relevant research arise. This could mean there will be ongoing costs not accounted for in our allocated funding.

### Early Interventions Are Critical for California’s Young Learners

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “developmental disabilities are a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas.” In addition, as many as one in four children, ages zero to five, are at moderate or high risk for developmental, behavioral, or social delays[[1]](#footnote-2). These delays begin during the developmental period, affect day-to-day living, and usually are permanent. However, it is possible to improve a person’s quality of life by providing the resources they need and practical solutions to be less disabling to an individual experiencing a disability.

Developmental disabilities can affect the way individuals interact with the world and can create significant challenges as a result. Data shows that intervention is likely to be more effective when it is provided earlier in life rather than later as early intervention services can change a child’s developmental path and improve outcomes for children, families, and communities. In 2006, an American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement indicated that only 20 to 30 percent of children are identified as needing help before school begins[[2]](#footnote-3) and under-identification persists today.

According to the *Evaluation of the Feasibility and Perceived Value of Integrating Learn the Signs. Act Early. Developmental Monitoring Resources in Early Head Start[[3]](#footnote-4)*, having systems to monitor and screen children gives caregivers, educators, and pediatricians a shared language in which to discuss any emerging concerns, effectively removing certain barriers from the process.

In a similar vein, early literacy intervention is pivotal to learning outcomes. The CDE and the SBE have defined literacy in the *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework* to include reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language development in all disciplines taught. As literacy is something that encompasses most major ways we interface with the world around us, early identification for potential literacy delays is crucial to the socialization, learning, and development of children.

According to the International Dyslexia Association, dyslexia is a brain-based learning challenge that affects about 15 percent of the population and is unrelated to intelligence[[4]](#footnote-5). Children with dyslexia have trouble learning to read and write and can fall behind if the condition is unaddressed. While dyslexia is not typically diagnosed in CSPPs, TK, or K as children are not yet fluent readers, there are risk factors that can be identified. These risk factors may be identified within the scope of the Reading Difficulties Risk Screener Selection Panel work and with tailored support, children with dyslexia and other literacy delays can have a more enjoyable and meaningful learning and reading experience.

### Existing State and Federal Initiatives in Literacy

In this section, we will provide a summary of current initiatives in California that demonstrate California’s ongoing commitment to language and literacy and are pivotal in supporting California’s youngest learners to read.

#### Literacy Campaign

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond launched a literacy campaign to ensure that all California students learn to read by third grade by the year 2026 and that all high school students are fully literate upon graduation. This effort also includes a biliteracy milestone for multilingual learners. As a part of this campaign, Superintendent Thurmond appointed a Literacy/Biliteracy Task Force to convene experts and community partners to design a strategy for reaching these goals. Two Statewide Literacy Co-Directors were hired to lead this effort; their charge is to improve student performance and address equity gaps; promote evidence-based literacy instruction; and coordinate and align state, regional, and local literacy implementation.

The Literacy Campaign builds on the policy guidance for literacy and biliteracy contained in the following documents: *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools*; *California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations*; *California English Learner Roadmap*; *California Dyslexia Guidelines*; *California Practitioners’ Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities*; *Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students*; *California Comprehensive Literacy State Development Plan*;and *Digital Learning Integration and Standards Guidance.* Each of these documents addresses the needs of children from birth to age five or in transitional kindergarten. Although each document addresses student assessment, few focus on the early identification of young children at risk for developmental delays or learning disabilities.

#### State and Federal Grant Programs

Since 2019, numerous state and federal grants have been initiated to support improved student literacy outcomes in California. Chief among those has been the Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant (CLSD), which awarded the CDE $37.5 million in grant funds[[5]](#footnote-6) to leverage and expand existing statewide infrastructure, guidance, and expertise to bring coherence to the system of literacy supports to improve student outcomes over a period of five years. As a primary objective of the CLSD grant program, the California Comprehensive State Literacy Plan was developed and adopted by the State Board of Education. This evidence-based plan aligns and integrates state literacy initiatives, content standards, and state guidance documents to support teachers of students, from birth through grade twelve. The plan can be found at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ps/documents/cacompstatelitplan.pdf>. The subsequent grant competition sought Local Literacy Lead Agencies to implement the State Plan priorities, including Priority 1 for birth to age five projects to support early childhood education (ECE) programs that promote literacy-rich environments and experiences and support the quality of programs and their capacity to foster early language and literacy skills. San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools was awarded approximately $6 million in partnership with Fresno and Orange Counties to implement this priority.

Many additional grant programs have been funded in California to provide literacy professional learning for educators, support for school site literacy planning, literacy coaching and specialists, and learning acceleration during this period. These projects include the California Dyslexia Initiative; Educator Workforce Investment Grants in Special Education and Multilingual/English Learner Education; Early Literacy Support Block Grant; Learning Acceleration Grant; Reading Instruction and Intervention Grant; and Literacy coaches and Reading Specialists Educator Training Grant.

#### Recent Budget Provisions for Literacy

In addition to the Screening for Risk of Reading Difficulties efforts, Senate Bill 114 (Chapter 48, Statutes of 2023) also provides funding for the development of a Literacy Roadmap. The Literacy Roadmap is intended to help educators apply the *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework* to classroom instruction, navigate the resources and professional learning opportunities available to implement effective literacy instruction, and improve literacy outcomes for all pupils with a focus on equity. It will include models of effective practice that incorporate the five themes of the framework: foundational skills, meaning making, language development, effective expression, and content knowledge, and it will provide guidance for offering evidence-based literacy instruction, including explicit instruction in phonics, phonemic awareness, and other decoding skills, as well as development of vocabulary, comprehension, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

#### Preschool/TK Learning Foundations

While significant effort and funding have been focused on K–12 early literacy initiatives (as described in the sections above), fewer have been specifically allocated to early education. Specific to early education, the Preschool/TK Learning Foundations (PTKLF), developed by the CDE, is a publication that outlines key knowledge and skills that most children ages three to five and a half can achieve when provided with the kinds of interactions, instruction, and environments that research has shown to promote early learning and development. The PTKLF can provide early childhood educators, parents, and the public with a clear understanding of the wide range of knowledge and skills that children typically attain when given the benefits of a high-quality preschool or TK program. The CDE’s EED, in partnership with subject matter experts, have revised the PTKLF with particular attention to recent research in language and literacy development for children ages three to five and a half years old and is in the final stages of copyediting for publishing. However, there is currently no funding to support professional development and coaching relating to the revised PTKLF.

### Existing State and Federal Initiatives Supporting Students with Developmental Disabilities

In this section, we will highlight important grants and initiatives that support students with developmental disabilities.

#### Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program

Authorized by the California Legislature and administered by the CDE EED, Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program (IEEEP) awards grants on a competitive basis to LEAs for the purpose of increasing access to inclusive early learning and care programs for children with disabilities, including children with severe disabilities, particularly in low-income, high-need communities. The three main activities for the IEEEP grant include 1) making facility repairs and renovations that will assist children with disabilities with greater access, 2) building or purchasing adaptive equipment to improve the accessibility for indoor and outdoor environments, and 3) providing professional development to ensure that early learning and care staff are prepared to serve children with a broad range of disabilities, including children with severe disabilities. Required training includes the Ages and Stages Questionnaire-Social Emotional (ASQ-SE), Supporting Inclusive Practices, adaptations and accommodations, Universal Design for Learning, and behavior and the use of Positive Behavioral Supports.

Please note that while the scope of this grant can serve the needs of early identification work, it is not specific enough to encompass and require literacy-specific work for children with disabilities. Additionally, while required training does include the ASQ-SE, it does not require the ASQ-3, which is a more comprehensive tool that covers developmental delays pursuant to Part B of IDEA, which is a statutory requirement mandated for this report.

In addition, the $162 million for the 2022–27 continuation of the IEEEP grant, while a substantial investment, has been reduced from the original $250 million resulting in less funding for programs to pay for and administer screeners and provide support for children with disabilities.

#### CSPP Quality Rating and Improvement System Block Grant

Starting in 2014–15, SB 858 (Chapter 32, Statutes of 2014) authorized $50 million in ongoing Proposition 98 General Fund for the CSPP Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Block Grant (CSPP QRIS Block Grant). Thes CSPP QRIS Block Grant is one source of funding for California’s QRIS, Quality Counts California. The CSPP QRIS Block Grant supports local early learning quality improvement systems to increase access for the number of low-income children in high-quality California State Preschool Programs to prepare those children for success in school and life. QCC, implementation supports quality improvement in early learning and care programs and incorporates evidence-based elements and tools in the quality continuum framework tailored to local conditions and enhanced with local resources. QCC provides continuous quality improvement support and resources, including assessment of program elements and quality rating for elements such as child observation, developmental and health screening, lead teacher qualifications, effective teacher-child interactions, ratios and group size, as well as director qualifications. The ASQ-3 and the ASQ-SE are the developmental screening tools that are required in order to earn a high tier (4 and 5 out of 5) rating on the QRIS. While early identification of developmental delays is part of this grant, it is not the sole priority, nor does it include the early identification of early literacy delays. Further, this funding has been held static since 2014 and has not been augmented through cost-of-living adjustments or necessary increases in funding despite multiple rounds of expansion in the CSPP since this grant’s inception. Investments commensurate to the expansion and increasing costs of supporting quality, including early identification, are essential to maintain the integrity of support for CSPPs.

#### Learn the Signs. Act Early

This federal initiative, Learn the Signs. Act Early (LTSAE) led by the CDC focuses on identifying developmental milestones for children from birth to age five. It encourages parents to identify milestones for how their child plays, learns, speaks, acts, and moves to follow their child’s development and provides steps to discuss any concerns with a doctor. The main objective of the LTSAE initiative is to encourage caregivers to monitor their children’s development, by providing developmental checklists, along with access to the free Milestones Tracker application (app). While this initiative is not a valid and reliable screener, these tools are helpful for families and caregivers by providing education and understanding in order to complement formal screening.

#### The Early Start Program

As a response to federal legislation included in the IDEA, the California Department of Developmental Services created the Early Start Program (United States Code, Title 20, Section 1431 et seq). The Early Start program is California's early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Early Start services are available statewide and are provided in a coordinated, family-centered system. Pursuant to this law, two- and three-year-old children, upon meeting with an eligibility coordinator, are eligible for an array of services including evaluation, assessment, and service coordination, free of charge to caregivers.

## Proposed Tools for Early Identification

When working on the statutory charge pursuant to *EC* Section 8490, the CDE met with various interest holders (Sacramento County Office of Education, Desired Results Access, an assessment expert at the University of Oregon, and an assessment expert at the Learning Policy Institute) to share their expertise. Two existing tools were identified that may fulfill the requirements set forth by *EC* Section 8490: The Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) (with modifications) and Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). Common themes raised by interest holders upon reviewing these existing tools include the following:

* ***The DRDP Has Limited Applications for This Purpose.*** Almost all experts mentioned that the DRDP is not appropriate in this context. Cited reasons for the justification of this perspective include 1) the DRDP is intended to inform classroom instruction and identify learning opportunities, and 2) the tool is a developmental progression and is not currently validated or normed for use as a screener that presents discrete categories or “flags” for potential developmental delays. However, some feedback indicated that with the addition of the literacy structured prompts in development for the DRDP Preschool and Kindergarten tool (2025), the DRDP – with more funding for explicit adaptation and validation of these structured prompts for screening purposes - could potentially serve as an early literacy identification tool in children ages three to six.
* ***The ASQ-3 Is an Excellent Starting Point.*** Almost all individuals recommended the ASQ-3 as an early identification tool. Cited reasons for the justification of the ASQ-3 include 1) its ability to screen for developmental disabilities in ages two to five and a half, 2) its ability to screen for precursors to early literacy delays in children aged two (via the Communication measure), 3) its parent-centric design and general involvement of parents in developing solutions for the home, 4) its already widespread use in the many California State Preschool Programs, and 5) it’s availability in 10 languages other than English.

The following table is a summary of existing and pending tool costs and key considerations for those tools. In the Analysis of requirements needed to meet *EC* Section 8490 section, pros and cons are indicated with a + and – within the table.

**Figure 1 – Summary of Existing and Pending Tool Costs and Key Considerations**

|  | DRDP | ASQ-3 |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Cost of Tool | Free (once developed) | $295 per site starter kit and additional cost for online access |
| Timeline to Availability | Estimated 2026 for literacy structured prompts (which would need to then be adapted and validated for use as a screener) | Available now |
| Analysis of requirements needed to meet *EC* Section 8490 | - Is not valid and reliable for this purpose- Does not identify early literacy issues yet- Contract will need to be updated to fulfill the statutory requirements- Will not be ready within the statutory timeframe (not until 2025 at least)+ Would be free once developed for literacy delays (not as a developmental screener)/ no ongoing cost | - Ongoing cost- Only covers up to age 5 and a half and not the statutory requirement of age 6+ Fulfills most of the statutory obligations+ Already developed, valid and reliable+ Recommended by interest holders and field+ Already widely used in California+ Translated and available in multiple languages |

The CDE determined that the $2 million allocated for the development of an early identification tool and process would not be enough to create a new tool, a process for implementation, and the required training for implementation. In addition, the deadline provided to report on the developed tool isn’t sufficient to meet the time needed to develop a tool. The CDE would need to consider the existing early identification screening tools and how they could work in tandem as not one tool is able to support the differing intervention needs required by the statute.

Below, the CDE has provided a description of a developmental screening tool recommended, information on its use, and which parts of the statutory charge it covers. As stated previously, this report defers to the Reading Difficulties Risk Screener Selection Panel to identify appropriate reading screening instruments for kindergarten through second grade.

### The Ages and Stages Questionnaire

The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), offered through Brookes Publishing, is a “parent-centric” screening tool that engages parents and identifies potential developmental disabilities through a series of questionnaires. With 21 ASQ-3 questionnaires for use with children from one month to five and a half years old, this assessment considers children’s communication, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, problem-solving, and personal-social skills.

Through Brookes Publishing company, the ASQ-3 is research-based, valid, reliable, normed in six languages (and available in 11) and offers wider support for children and families in their home language. An accompanying web-based platform, ASQ Online, is also available for questionnaire completion for ease of data reporting, improved accuracy, and family access.

The ASQ has almost 40 years of rigorous research and user feedback in its development of questionnaires that identify children with developmental delays. Early childhood professionals across the country field-tested ASQ questionnaires with a diverse sample of young children and parents that reflect the demographic makeup of the United States to ensure the validity and reliability of the screening tool.

Currently in the research phase, the fourth edition of ASQ (ASQ-4) is planned for release in two years. It is anticipated that this version will include ages two to six years old, which satisfies the age requirement of *EC* Section 8490. Additional information regarding ASQ can be found on the ASQ website at <https://agesandstages.com/>.

The CDE selected this screening tool because it was highly recommended by the interest holders as it met most of the requirements of *EC* Section8490, covers all domains of development, and engages families in the screening process. The ASQ-3 and ASQ Online, currently available, are widely used in the field among CSPP, Head Start, and family childcare providers, along with parents and pediatricians. About 73 percent of CSPP sites participating in QCC already use the ASQ tools, often covering the expense with the CSPP QRIS Block Grant funds. The ASQ is embedded in the QCC Quality Continuum Framework Matrix of Measured Quality Elements, and programs that use it are given a higher score on the “Developmental and Health Screenings” measure/indicator.

The ASQ-3 Starter Kit costs $295 and includes 21 paper masters of the questionnaires and scoring sheets, a CD-ROM with printable PDF questionnaires, the essential ASQ-3 User’s Guide, and laminated ASQ-3 Quick Start Guides. Conservatively, one starter kit per site would be needed to get started. Separately from the starter kit, master copies of the 21 ASQ-3 questionnaires can be purchased in English and Spanish separately for $240. Arabic, Chinese, French, and Vietnamese offer a CD-ROM-only version of the questionnaires for $170, and five additional languages are available for purchase from other publishing companies. Pricing for ASQ Online will vary depending on factors such as if more than one physical location will be using ASQ Online, which tools will be used, if screening in languages other than English will be needed, the volume of screenings anticipated, if parents/caregivers will need logins, and if the data would need to be transferred or downloaded to a separate database.

There are multiple training options available, essential for the ASQ-3. These include:

* Digital training with DVDs: Three DVD trainings are available at a one-time cost of $49.95 each, totaling $149.85 for the complete set;
* Comprehensive ASQ-3 Seminar provides in-person or virtual training seminar training for up to 25 people with a seminar fee of $3,500.00 per day, exclusive of trainer’s traveling fees;
* Virtual ASQ Online Hands-On Learning Sessions which cost $425.00 per participant; and
* Virtual Training of Trainers Institute provides training for up to 25 people, which is $7,175.00 plus $200.00 per participant.

While the ASQ-3 does address developmental delays pursuant to Part B of the federal IDEA (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 et seq.), the ASQ-3 does not capture or screen for early literacy delays for children ages two to six years old, which is an essential component of *EC* Section 8490. The ASQ-3 can identify precursors to delays in literacy via the communication/language domain, which is sufficient for children younger than age 3; however, it is not useful in determining whether children ages three to six will experience early literacy delays.

### Considerations

The CDE’s analysis reveals the ASQ-3 has strengths; however, does not embody all elements of *EC* Section8490’s charge. While the ASQ already exists and is widely utilized and respected, the limitation to the ASQ-3/ASQ Online is the ongoing cost for access to the tool and the training for implementation, both of which would exceed the $2 million allocated in *EC* Section8490 if scaled statewide. Considering the number of sites and the turnover of employees in education, the early education system is not sufficiently funded to provide the annual support needed to implement tools across early education programs. The CDE has explored the cost calculations to use ASQ-3, and the eventual migration to ASQ-4 when available and has determined additional funding appropriated by the Legislature would be needed for statewide implementation. Funding for translation of the ASQ-3 into additional languages including Korean, Russian, and Tagalog, would increase access to the tool.

In addition, the ASQ questionnaires alone do not go far enough in communication and language to identify potential literacy delays in children 3 years and older that are a requirement of *EC* Section 8490. An additional literacy screening tool focusing on literacy development in early childhood would address that gap.

## Proposed Process for Early Identification

The CDE continues to leverage the existing referral process for early identification and has not identified a separate process as tools have yet to be determined. Once completed, the CDE will follow up with a Management Bulletin and corresponding rulemaking to implement these early identification activities.

While the CDE acknowledges the steps to a successful referral process will vary locally and by setting type or grade, the following components to the professional development process are important to consider for providing further evaluation, support, remediation, and communication approaches with parents/guardians to address student support at home.

### Administering the Tool(s)

Access to early identification tools, such as ASQ-3 and literacy screening tools, is vital as assessment and identification cannot happen without the proper suite of tools. Comprehensive training on each tool to administer and score must be made available to all educators, providers, and administrators, and should include best practices for implementing the tool and communicating with families in a culturally responsive way. For example, programs need to understand that testing and parent/guardian perception of “reporting” on their child can be interpreted differently by families depending on their cultural background, and families need to feel supported in this process. This should also involve ensuring parents have access to a tool in their home language with support to complete the tool with varying modalities. There may also be apprehension from parents and families surrounding the effort of filling out questionnaires and the personal information that is collected about their child’s development. Ideally, all of California’s children would have an early intervention screening.

### **Processing and Communicating** Results

Training on how to process, interpret, and communicate screening results to parents and caregivers should be available to all educators, providers, and administrators. This training should include considerations for the variety of follow-up actions resulting from the screening. Best practices include engaging the family in their home language for the development of a plan and/or strategies for next steps as not all screening results in immediate referral to services. Families must feel supported with strategies on how to promote their child’s development in the home learning environment, and strategies should be communicated in a culturally responsive way. The ASQ-3 includes training for processing and communicating results sensitively to caregivers.

### Referral to Services

Training should be made available to all adults employed in CSPP, TK, and K programs on how to navigate the referral process with consideration of the differing intervention needs children may have as determined by the screening. Connecting families to specific intervention supports, such as additional evaluation, services, and resources, is critical for positive outcomes. This technical assistance should also involve follow-up communication with families and, when available, a child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team. It is key that educators feel supported when advocating for services to be provided to children in the general education setting to promote the least restrictive environment. The LTSAE tool complements this part of the process with consumer education on milestone identification. Help Me Grow (HMG) California is also a resource. HMG is a system approach to developmental screening that is present in over half the counties in the state and provides the care coordination necessary to ensure the best and most timely access to appropriate services. Training should be available to educators on how to equitably interpret the screening results, support activities after screening, make referrals, and understand the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and IEP process. Each step is critical in the early intervention and inclusion support for the best outcomes. Educators should also receive training on how to provide this support so that families feel included and welcomed.

### Equity and Inclusion Supports

#### Equity

As the CDE considers the referral process, training should be available to educators on conducting this work equitably and without bias. This includes how to equitably administer a screening, interpret the screening results, support activities after screening, make referrals, and understand the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and IEP process. Each step is critical in the early intervention and inclusion support for the best outcomes. Educators should also receive training on how to collaborate on this support so that families feel included and welcomed.

#### Proposed Inclusion Support: Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists

Through the Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists Program (see Appendix B), the CDE supports the use of literacy coaches and reading specialists as an inclusion support and resource for TK through grade three. This effort aims to develop school literacy programs, employ and train literacy coaches and reading and literacy specialists, and develop and implement interventions for pupils in need of targeted literacy support.

In consideration of *EC* Section 8490 support, the practice of having literacy coaches and/or reading and literacy specialists seems promising for early learning; however, additional data would be needed regarding outcomes from the grant program to understand how recruiting and retaining literacy coaches/reading specialists could be expanded to support preschool with early interventions and other language and literacy assessments, such as the DRDP. Additional funding would be needed for this effort.

### Early Childhood Resources for Educators and Parents

The CDE is mindful that children develop at different rates and in different ways. Those who care for children, including educators and parents, must understand children’s developmental milestones so they may be able to identify when interventions could be needed. Educating those who care for our early learners about development is essential for positive developmental outcomes. Providing access to resources and training for educators and parents about early identification of developmental and literacy delays is an essential step in this process.

In addition to LTSAE and Early Start, which have developed websites rich with detailed information, there are many resources available that may assist with communication approaches with families and education for the support of early identification. The following websites and publications can be used before, during, or after a formal screening to support understanding:

* The All About Young Children: Information for Families on Children’s Early Development website identifies what skills help children learn, how they learn language, how they learn about feelings and relationships, how they learn about numbers, and how they become skillful at moving their bodies. The site is offered in eight languages and supports understanding for birth to age five. More information can be found on the All About Young Children website at <https://allaboutyoungchildren.org/>.
* The California Early Childhood Online platform (CECO) provides modules based on state-of-the-art information and best practices in one centralized location to meet the ever-changing needs of the early childhood field. Most courses are available in English and Spanish. Notable courses include Dual Language Learners, Family Partnership and Culture, Health and Safety, and Responsive and Inclusive Early Learning and Care Environments. The “Watch Me! Celebrating Milestones and Sharing Concerns” course includes the following four modules that support early identification:
	+ Module 1: Your Important Role in Monitoring Children's Development
	+ Module 2: Understanding Children’s Developmental Milestones
	+ Module 3: Objective and Engaged Developmental Monitoring
	+ Module 4: How to Talk with Parents about their Child’s Development

It is also important to note that the Foundations and Frameworks Overview Module - Early Learning and Development System Infant/Toddler and Preschool course was based upon the *California Preschool Learning Foundations* publications that are currently being revised to the *Preschool/TK Learning Foundations* (PTKLF) as mentioned earlier in this report. For more information about CECO, please visit the California Early Childhood Online website at <https://www.caearlychildhoodonline.org/>.

* The CDE Reasons for Concern web page gives clear guidance on what to do when you suspect your child or a child in your care may have a disability or special need(s). Guidance is differentiated by the child’s age and provides links to the California Department of Developmental Services (CDDS), the local Special Education Local Plan Area, family resource center, family empowerment center, and/or instruction to call their local school district. Additional information can be found on the CDE Reasons for Concern web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/fp/concerns.asp>.
* The CDE’s Inclusive Early Education Resources web page houses more than 60 links to resources and websites that support inclusive policies and practices for early care and education. There are CSPP Resources, Professional Development Resources as well as a number of resources specifically for Parents. Notable topics include:
	+ Related Management Bulletins and webinars for guidance
	+ Assessment and Evaluation Process
	+ Developmental Milestones, including LTSAE
	+ Parent Resources, including Early Start, Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR), National Center for Learning Disabilities, Parents Helping Parents of Santa Clara, and First 5 California

For additional information, please visit the CDE’s Inclusive Early Education Resources web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/fp/concerns.asp>.

* The *Effective Early Childhood Transitions: A Guide for Transition at Age Three – Early Start to Preschool* publication is a collaborative project of the CDDS and CDE that was published in 2013 for the specific purpose of considerations when transitioning children from Early Start to preschool. This publication can be found at <https://www.dds.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/EarlyStart_EffectiveTransitions_20190205.pdf>.

### Annual Reporting

With a charge such as this, collecting data to understand key milestones or metrics of progress is essential. The CDE is exploring modifications to the existing Child Development Management Information System (CDMIS) to add a reporting requirement for CSPPs regarding early intervention screenings. The following prompt is an example of the type of information that could be added to the Child Information section of the CDD-801A Monthly Child Care Population Report (CDD-801A) for CSPPs, which could include the following question:

* Has an early intervention screening been completed for this child?
* If yes, identify action taken/next steps:
* Had or planned conversation with family and other caregivers
* Continued observation
* Environment enrichment/activities to try at home
* Referral for services/formal evaluation
* Get another opinion from another expert
* Other
* If no, options would include:
* Screening will be completed within six months
* Screening will be completed within 6-12 months
* Parent declined screening

While this change does not require legislative action, more research is needed regarding the cost to the CDE and/or to programs for implementing this change, determining the process and training for gathering and analyzing that data, and exploring reporting options for TK and K as they do not submit the CDD-801a. Additionally, the QCC Common Data File, which is submitted annually by QCC participants, could be modified to include additional screening fields or make “optional” fields regarding screening required so that sites participating in QCC across the continuum of care could contribute data for California’s early identification efforts.

### Local Practices and Implementation

As the CDE looks to local practices and implementation for early identification efforts, many of the tools, processes, and resources presented are already in place within California’s early education system. However, without dedicated and ongoing funding to implement these tools and processes, CSPPs must lean into other systems of support for training and technical assistance.

As mentioned earlier, QCC and supporting programs do prioritize early intervention activities within the scope of their grants. It is possible for the QCC-related grants to support a portion of the cost of access to tools; however, QCC is optional for CSPPs therefore not all CSPP sites participate in QCC. In addition, QCC is not funded to support TK and K and is thus not included. TK and K are, however, included within California’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports, which is built on the premise that universal support must be provided for all students, while recognizing that some students may need supplemental support at various times and a few students may require more intensified support some of the time to be successful in the most inclusive and equitable learning environment of their grade-level peers.

## Resources for Implementation

 As this report has outlined, there are a number of existing efforts that satisfy most of the components of *EC* Section 8490. Unfortunately, the $2 million dollars allotted is not enough to produce a new, robust, valid, and reliable tool and sustainable process that identifies children at risk for developmental delays or learning disabilities spanning ages two to six.

With that in mind, the CDE will use the $2 million to support expanded use of the ASQ-3 and accompanying ASQ Online for those CSPP sites that have not yet started using the questionnaires to identify developmental delays. Sites new to the ASQ may need resources in additional languages or need support to access the ASQ Online. This investment supports the commitment of *EC* Section 8490 for the identification of developmental delays for California’s young learners by providing the tools needed for immediate identification, further evaluation as needed, support and remediation based on the needs of the child, and additional referrals for services as deemed necessary.

The CDE will identify and collaborate with a QCC lead agency that is a county office of education to support this expansion of the ASQ within CSPPs. Determining local needs, ensuring support is equitably considered, working through logistics for distribution, and developing an implementation plan for training on the tool are tasks yet to be determined.

The CDE anticipates this effort may exceed the $2 million dollars allotted and has recommended a legislative appropriation for ongoing funding to support the implementation of the ASQ-3 and accompanying ASQ Online.

While efforts have been made to encumber the funds no later than June 30, 2024, the legislation for literacy screening instrument recommendations of SB 114 has delayed contract execution as CDE needed to shift the previously planned scope of work to refine the tasks within. This adjustment requires additional time for the thoughtful execution of the contract, facilitating the ASQ kit distribution, and training for CSPP contractors across California. The CDE anticipates this extended timeline would have funds encumbered and fully expended no later than June 30, 2025.

## Recommendations

As it is anticipated the CDE will expend the full $2 million dollars allocated, the following are recommendations for further investment and considerations for determining the early identification tools and process for system improvement.

An appropriation by the Legislature is recommended for the following early identification tools and activities for developmental delays. These actions would elevate the importance of early interventions for California’s youngest learners, ensure the priority is focused on the proper tools and critical elements of the referral process, and support realizing the requirements of *EC* Section 8490.

* ***Recommendation: Dedicated and ongoing funding to supply providers with access to the ASQ-3 tool and accompanying ASQ Online platform.*** The ASQ suite is costly and with limited grant funds available, many sites lack access to the tools. For each of the 3,444 CSPPs to receive a starter kit, questionnaires in another language, and access to ASQ Online, a conservative estimate of the investment would be $1,015,980. This figure includes the many CSPP sites participating in QCC that may already have a kit, but it does not calculate the cost for the increasing number of TK and K classrooms that may not already administer the ASQ-3, nor the additional materials needed to conduct the screening. In addition, there would be an additional annual cost to maintain ASQ Online and a cost to migrate to the ASQ-4 when it becomes available.
* ***Recommendation: Dedicated and ongoing funding to support the professional development and training for implementation of ASQ-3.*** The comprehensive two-day training on the tool would be $7,000 for 25 people. A conservative estimate for a single person from each of the 3,444 CSPP sites to attend the training would be $1,654,800.This figure does not exclude the QCC sites that may already be using the ASQ; however, considering the turnover in the early education field, it seems prudent to include those sites in the calculation. Again, professional development training for TK and K would be an additional investment that is not included in this figure nor any retraining for migrating to the ASQ-4. Another approach would be to institute a Train the Trainer model. The Virtual Training of Trainers Institute on the tool would be $7,175, plus $200 per participant, for 25 people. An initial cost to train 200 trainers/coaches would be $97,400. This approach would leverage the existing system of trainers and coaches from QCC and other initiatives and help to build sustainability. The cost of annual training would be less and dependent upon turnover and the needs of California. It is also possible that with a statewide contract with ASQ, the state would receive a reduced rate for professional development and training, but we have not yet pursued this question with Brookes Publishing company.
* ***Consideration: Provide new funding for, or explicitly identify early education sites within existing funding***, such as the Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists Program, in order for early education sites like the California State Preschool Program may also benefit from literacy supports such as reading specialists and literacy coaches.
* ***Consideration: Continue to support Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) as part of a shared continuum for education.*** The CDE encourages efforts for continued alignment in policies, structure, instructional content, and family involvement from PreK into the early grades and beyond. Many of the literacy initiatives currently tangential to the CDE EED’s work consistently exclude preschool-age children. In conversations with interest holders, we have found this may be in part because historically, early education and K–12 education systems have been treated as separate, as opposed to belonging to a shared continuum. With UPK and Preschool through Third Grade (P–3) Alignment efforts increasing, the California SBE’s January 10, 2023, Agenda highlighted the importance of this shift stating, “Alignment in policies, structure, instructional content, and family involvement from PreK into the early grades (PreK to third grade) can support the desired continuity across children’s experiences in high-quality settings. This continuity, when used to intentionally scaffold progressive learning experiences, can further support progression in children’s development and learning across content areas by increasing the breadth and depth of children’s understanding and connections among topics from year to year.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

## Appendix A

### EDUCATION CODE - EDC

#### TITLE 1 GENERAL EDUCATION CODE PROVISIONS [1. - 32527]

 *(Title 1 enacted by Stats. 1976, Ch. 1010)*

#### DIVISION 1 GENERAL EDUCATION CODE PROVISIONS [1. - 32527]

 *(Division 1 enacted by Stats. 1976, Ch. 1010)*

#### PART 6. EDUCATION PROGRAMS—STATE MASTER PLANS [8006 - 9004]

 *(Part 6 enacted by Stats. 1976, Ch. 1010)*

#### CHAPTER 2. Early Education Act [8200 - 8490]

 *(Heading of Chapter 2 amended by Stats. 2021, Ch. 116, Sec. 1)*

**ARTICLE 24. Identification of Developmental Delays and Learning Disabilities [8490- 8490.]**

 *(Article 24 added by Stats. 2022, Ch. 62, Sec. 14)*

###### [8490](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=1.&title=1.&part=6.&chapter=2.&article=24.&op_statues=2022&op_chapter=62&op_section=14).

(a) Of the funds appropriated in Item 6100-001-0001 of Section 2.00 of the Budget Act of 2022, two million dollars ($2,000,000) shall be allocated to the department to develop a process and tools for early identification of children at risk for developmental delays or learning disabilities. The funding in the Budget Act of 2022 that is allocated for purposes of this section shall be available for encumbrance until June 30, 2024.

(b) (1) The process and tools developed by the department pursuant to subdivision (a) shall include immediate identification, further evaluation as needed, support and remediation based on needs of the child, and additional referrals for services as deemed necessary.

(2) A process for research-based early intervention that considers the differing intervention needs children may have in areas of concern.

(3) Evidence that the process and tools are valid and reliable for identification of all delays pursuant to Part B of the federal IDEA (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 et seq.), including, but not limited to, dyslexia and other early literacy delays, and for identification of literacy and language acquisition for children two to six years of age, inclusive, who speak a home language that is not English.

(4) Communication approaches with parents and guardians to address student supports in the home learning environment.

(c) The process and tools developed by the department pursuant to subdivision (a) shall be available and appropriate for use in all California state preschool programs, transitional kindergarten programs, and kindergarten programs pursuant to guidance from the Superintendent.

(d) (1) Notwithstanding the rulemaking provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 11340) of Part 1 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code) and Section 33308.5, until regulations are filed with the Secretary of State to implement this subdivision, the department shall implement this subdivision through management bulletins or similar letters of instruction no later than six months after the process and tools determination is complete.

(2) The department shall initiate a rulemaking action to implement this subdivision within one calendar year of the management bulletin being released.

(e) On or before October 5, 2023, the department shall submit a report to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, appropriate policy committees of the Legislature, and the Department of Finance to identify the process and tools developed pursuant to this section, the evidence required pursuant to this section, and recommendations to align local practices and implementation.

*(Added by Stats. 2022, Ch. 62, Sec. 14. (AB 210) Effective June 30, 2022. See same-numbered Art. 24 as added by Stats. 2022, Ch. 915.)*

## Appendix B

**Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists Program**

Assembly Bill 181, Section 137 (Chapter 52, Statutes of 2022)[[7]](#footnote-8) allocates $250 million one time for the Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists Grant Program “to develop school literacy programs, employ and train literacy coaches and reading and literacy specialists, and develop and implement interventions for pupils in need of targeted literacy support” for children in K, inclusive of TK, through grade three. Of these funds, $25 million are to be used as a competitive grant in collaboration with the Commission on Teacher Credentialing “to develop and provide training for educators to become literacy coaches and reading and literacy specialists.” According to the CDE’s Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialists FAQs web page, found at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ps/lcrsgrantfaq.asp>, this funding can be used to purchase assessment and intervention tools *and* can be used to support all students, even students outside of grades TK–3 if the receiving local educational agency (LEA) has students outside of grades TK–3. From this budget item, $225 million has already been distributed to eligible school sites, and the recipient(s) of the remaining $25 million is pending, as it is a competitive grant. Though there is a possibility for this funding to benefit the lower age range identified in *EC* 8490 (ages two and three), there is no guarantee that funds will, nor was this grant advertised with that scope in mind.

1. United States Department of Health and Human Services, *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! A Compendium of Screening Measures for Young Children (*2014) <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/list/watch-me-thrive/files/screening-compendium-march2014.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Council on Children with Disabilities; Section on Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics; Bright Futures Steering Committee; Medical Home Initiatives for Children with Special Needs Project Advisory Committee. *Identifying Infants and Young Children with Developmental Disorders in the Medical Home: An Algorithm for Developmental Surveillance and Screening Pediatrics. 2006; 118(1):405–420* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Abercrombie, J., Pann, J., Shin, F. *et al.* Evaluation of the Feasibility and Perceived Value of Integrating *Learn the Signs. Act Early.* Developmental Monitoring Resources in Early Head Start. *Early Childhood Educ J* 50, 1169–1181 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01247-5> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. International Dyslexia Association. 2023. <https://dyslexiaida.org/> (accessed on August 29, 2023) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See more on the CDE’s CLSD Grant web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ps/clsd.asp>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. California State Board of Education January 2023 Agenda Item #10. [https://caeducation.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/StatePreschoolWork/EUFphjJJSMFMjJBD\_K7imUoBThFB7nyxUDq3f1NnmrR0tg?e=FcyNIQ&wdLOR=cAE8CA6A1-FE1A-49D2-93DF-DCFAB67A893E](https://caeducation.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/s/StatePreschoolWork/EUFphjJJSMFMjJBD_K7imUoBThFB7nyxUDq3f1NnmrR0tg?e=FcyNIQ&wdLOR=cAE8CA6A1-FE1A-49D2-93DF-DCFAB67A893E)

 (Accessed August 30, 2023) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. For requirements regarding the Literacy Coaches and Reading Specialist program, please access the California Legislative Information website at <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB181> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)