

The Leadership Challenge!

Early Childhood Group

Jennifer Baker, Napa Valley Unified School District
Rachel Esguerra, San Diego Public Library
Erika Goodwin, Los Angeles County Library

Derek Stalcup, Ventura County Library
Sarah Vantrease, Sonoma County Library
Mike Shea, Pasadena Public Library

Introduction

Public Libraries have been providing programming and resources to support early childhood education for decades. However, they are not generally recognized as formal partners in early childhood education initiatives and are overlooked by funders and decision makers in efforts to promote early literacy and prepare children for kindergarten.

Our newly elected Governor, Gavin Newsom has promised an “aggressive approach” on early childhood. To ensure libraries are included in this effort, we need to be aggressive too.

The Early Childhood Group’s Challenge: *To position libraries as key providers of early childhood education throughout the state.*

Project Description

Our team sought ways to help California’s libraries get a “seat at the table” where Early Learning policies and procedures are being discussed. At the State Level, this meant finding a way to demonstrate the vital role of California libraries to the Newsom Administration.

Working with the CLA Legislative Committee, we prepared a letter of introduction directed at the governor, inviting Governor Newsom and his staff “to explore California’s libraries, and urging the administration to include libraries in strategies and plans that invest in early childhood education.”

With the help of CLA’s lobbyists, Early Childhood team members joined Michelle Perera and Hilary Theyer, CLA President and President-elect; Carolyn Brooks, California State Library; and Christina DiCaro, CLA’s Lobbyist; in a meeting with Katie Hardeman, consultant for the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance, as well as the Governor’s new “Senior Policy Advisor for Early Childhood,” Giannina Pérez.

For the meeting, we crafted a brochure, *Early Childhood Learning & Kindergarten Readiness: Public Libraries Lead the Way*, that highlights Early Learning achievements by libraries across the state. The brochure features a range of projects, from routine storytimes to the most cutting edge grants, supporting all different kinds of communities, and at a variety of funding levels. Our visit was very well-received - Ms. Pérez was particularly generous with her time as we talked about the importance of early childhood education and how libraries fit into the picture.

An April 9 letter to Ms. Pérez and to the Director of the Department of Finance, sent by CLA and signed by Michelle Perera, referenced our February meetings and asked the Governor to consider an additional appropriation of funds in his May budget revision, to support libraries as essential partners in early childhood learning.

At the Local Level, we crafted an Introductory Letter template that individual libraries could customize to reach out to their city council, school board, commission, board of trustees, etc. Using the letter template and the State Level brochure, libraries have an opportunity to make important constituents aware of both their own Early Learning activities and the incredible work done by the California Library community at large.

We also wanted to demonstrate the value in providing library staff with training opportunities, empowering them to lead Early Learning programs and initiatives at libraries across the state. We enrolled a small cohort of volunteers in a Library Juice Academy Early Learning course. Using a brief before-and-after survey, we measured the change in their confidence in taking on Early Learning responsibilities in their library. With the help of Library Juice Academy staff, we were also able to contact additional individuals who had recently completed an Early Learning course, resulting in a survey of more than 40 people working in a variety of roles at libraries across the state.

Outcomes

In our survey, we asked respondents to indicate their level of confidence in leading early learning education programs both before and after taking the Early Learning course. As you can see in the charts, there was a significant increase in staff confidence, with ALL respondents indicating at least some level of confidence following the course, and a jump in Very Confident from 30% to 86%.

And at both the State and Local levels, our brochure has made an impact with all who have received it, from budget committee members and legislators during “Day in the District” meetings, to local Library Commissioners. Time and again, the response has been one of amazement at what Libraries are doing in their community and across the state.

Accomplishments and Next Steps

The *Public Libraries Lead the Way* brochure is available to download on the CLA Leadership website for anyone to use, and our customizable Introductory Letter will also be made available to the California Library community on the CLA Leadership website as well.

In October, our team will be partnering with the CLA Legislative Committee to present a program at the California Library Association Annual Conference in Pasadena.

Recommendations

Given the great response to their innovative training programs in the past, the California State Library should continue to invest in early childhood education opportunities for library staff.

The State Library should seek funding to map the Early Childhood Learning landscape within the state.

The State Library should fund copycat grant opportunities for libraries to take on any of the programs highlighted in our brochure.