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SB 976 Will Offer Much-Needed Flexibility for Families to Access Transitional Kindergarten for their Children

Thursday, February 10, 2022

SACRAMENTO – Continuing her work to expand educational and developmental opportunities for young children, Senator Connie M. Leyva (D-Chino) today introduced legislation that establishes universal preschool in California. Specifically, SB 976 ensures that parents have the option to send their children to a public elementary school provider or a community-based childcare provider to benefit from universal preschool.

“It is critical that California offers flexibility and options for working families with children who would benefit from transitional kindergarten, but are unable to access those services because of their own work or other day-to-day responsibilities,” Senator Leyva said. “SB 976 will help parents access schooling and care options for their young children that allow for flexible hours, such as early drop-off, late pick-up, weekend care, or year-round care. This important measure will also help to protect the stability of jobs for teachers at community-based providers, which employ primarily women of color. If these care facilities in the community close—which will very likely happen to many of them if we do not expand flexibility—many women will lose their jobs and families will have even fewer options for their children.”

In 2021, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed SB 130, which authorized universal transitional kindergarten. Under this new law, transitional kindergarten was expanded to require that all children who turn four by September 1 must be admitted to a transitional kindergarten program by the 2025-26 school year. Transitional kindergarten is the first year of a two-year kindergarten program that uses a modified kindergarten curriculum that is age and developmentally appropriate. This program is designed to serve ‘older’ four-year-olds and ‘younger’ five-year-olds.

According to the enabling legislation passed last year, public elementary schools are the exclusive setting where transitional kindergarten can be provided. Under current law, low-income age eligible children can only stay with their current community childcare provider if their family pays a fee, which can be up to 10% of a family’s total income. State sponsored transitional kindergarten is free for all families regardless of income level. SB 976 would build on SB 130 by establishing universal preschool, which would allow children and families with different needs to access this system that is presently inaccessible for those with inflexible work schedules or other responsibilities.

Additionally, SB 976 would provide much-needed stability for licensed community-based providers and their employees—many of whom are women of color—such that they will not be forced to close due to declining enrollment of preschool-aged children.

SB 976 is sponsored by the Child Care Resource Center, EveryChild California, and the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network and has also already earned the support of over a dozen leading children, parent, labor and community organizations from across the state. This measure will be considered in Senate policy committee(s) later this spring.

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