

# WHY THE PK-3 ECE CREDENTIAL MATTERS

The PK–3 Early Childhood Education Specialist Credential (or PK-3 ECE Credential) is designed for those who want to teach and support young children in preschool, transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and Grades 1–3. This credential and the related preparation program create a vital pathway that expands opportunities for both educators and young learners.

## FIVE FAST FACTS ABOUT THE PK-3 ECE CREDENTIAL

# #1

### EVERY CHILD COUNTS

California is home to one of the largest and most diverse groups of young children in the country—making it a vital place to build strong early learning systems.

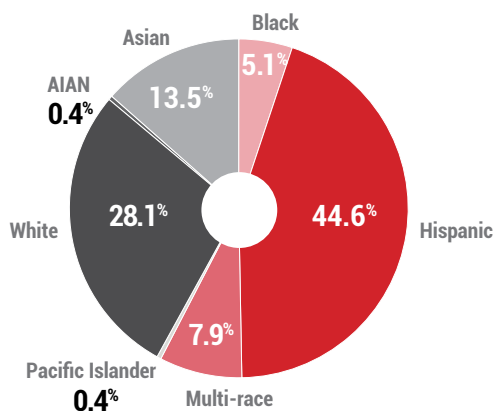
### California's large and diverse population of young children is one of its greatest strengths.

When we build strong and inclusive early learning systems, we give every child the chance for a strong start; lay the foundation for their lifelong success; and foster the vibrancy and vitality of families, communities, and the entire state.

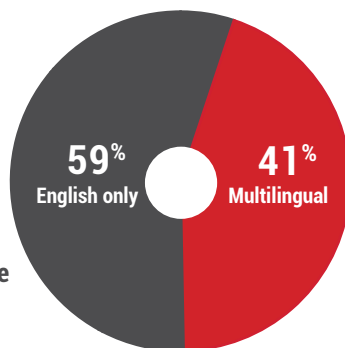
Over **3 million children** living in California are of preschool to third-grade age (**3–9 years old**) and are in their most pivotal years of learning<sup>1</sup>

With **nearly half** of all young children identifying as Hispanic, California's early learners reflect the rich diversity that defines the state.<sup>2</sup>

Race/Ethnicity of Children 0-9 Years



Many of California's young children are growing up **speaking more than one language** and helping to shape a multilingual future for education.



41% of children speak a language other than English at home.<sup>3</sup>

**65.8%**  
multilingual learners



The majority of multilingual learners (65.8%) in California schools are enrolled in the elementary grades (versus secondary grades).<sup>4</sup>

*"The state's early childhood students, our youngest learners, are the probably the most diverse group of young people the state has ever had. They come from different walks of life. Lots of students who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and they bring incredible skill sets and assets to the learning. We need to pick up on those and make learning relevant for them."*

Dr. Shireen Pavri, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Educator & Leadership Programs, California State University, Office of the Chancellor

*"I would say they are children of diverse linguistic, cultural backgrounds, and they may come from different socioeconomic status. And many of them have very loving parents who care about their education and learning experiences. I think the strengths that children bring into schools or programs are their energy, their curiosity, their passion about this world."*

Dr. Pei-Ying Wu, Associate Professor, Fansler Chair, and PK-3 ECE Credential Coordinator, Fresno State University

## #2

### CSU DRIVING CHANGE

California State University (CSU) is leading the way in expanding PK-3 ECE Credential Programs across the state to successfully cultivate a new generation of early childhood educators.

- **The PK-3 ECE Credential is a unique opportunity** to gain the skills and competencies needed to become expert in teaching young children. The credential authorizes holders to teach all subjects in preschool, transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and Grades 1–3.
- **The PK-3 ECE Credential is a specialized credential.** Unlike the Multiple Subject Credential, which emphasizes broad content knowledge across the elementary curriculum, the PK-3 ECE Credential is grounded in a whole-child focus that integrates cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development with academic learning.
- **Significant progress has been made as CSU campuses establish PK-3 ECE Credential Programs as a core part of their offerings.** Multiple campuses across the state are now supporting students in obtaining their credential through providing comprehensive coursework, hands-on experiences, and tailored advising and supports. [Learn more about CSU Approved PK-3 Early Childhood Education \(ECE\) Programs.](#)



# #3

## PREPARING STRONG, SKILLED EDUCATORS

PK-3 ECE Credential Programs intentionally prepare educators by building deep knowledge of how young children learn best and fostering the skills that lead to more impactful teaching.

- **The PK-3 ECE Credential was intentionally designed to prepare educators with the specialized knowledge** needed to successfully teach and support young children from preschool through third grade.
- **Young children deserve learning environments that reflect their unique needs.** PK-3 ECE Credential Programs focus on guiding and mentoring educators to implement practices that are foundational to equitable and effective early learning. Programs emphasize developmentally appropriate practice, family and community engagement, and culturally responsive teaching to support young learners' growth across domains, while still aligning with academic standards in early literacy, mathematics, and other content areas.
- **The PK-3 ECE Credential ensures that young children have access to strong, skilled teachers** with the expertise to create high-quality classroom environments and rich educational experiences that spark curiosity, build a love of learning, and nurture their development.

*"The PK-3 ECE Credential Program is an important piece of the puzzle to establishing developmentally appropriate practices in PK-3 classrooms and aligning instruction across the early years of a child's education journey. It's also a way to honor the teachers who seek to work with this younger population, so that they can focus their professional development on digging deeper into the learning needs of young learners. ... Teachers need to be prepared to both adequately serve children with a variety of learning needs while also advocating for the additional support they need."*

Dr. Andrea Golloher, Associate Professor, Department of Special Education and Founder of the Early Childhood Institute, San José State University

*"You have these years of experience and it's such a gift that you can bring to the education system. I think that it's really important that we have people who are trained and can actually help and support as they're moving into having all these elementary schools have TK be a part of the program ... it's really important to provide that care for those children that are coming in that is developmentally appropriate."*

Shacarra, Student at California State University, Dominguez Hills

# #4

## OPPORTUNITY REQUIRES ACTION

Important changes are happening in education where we must increase our commitment to PK-3. The PK-3 ECE Credential helps ensure that we are able to meet this moment.

- **California has made a historic commitment to early childhood education.** In 2021, the state set a bold goal to provide universal prekindergarten (UPK) for all 4-year-olds by 2025–2026 and expand access for income-eligible 3-year-olds.<sup>5</sup> The state's largest new investment in UPK is the expansion of transitional kindergarten, which is now available for all 4-year-olds for the 2025–2026 school year.<sup>6</sup>
- **This statewide progress creates both urgency and a vital opportunity to invest in the educators that can fully meet the needs of young children.**
- **As California welcomes more young learners into the system, expanding and investing in the PK-3 ECE Credential is critical** to build a robust and well-prepared workforce to support every child's growth, learning, and success.

*"California has invested in universal prekindergarten through the expansion of transitional kindergarten. This means public schools now need to be ready to work with children from 4 years old. Elementary schools need teachers who are well prepared to meet the needs of these young learners."*

Dr. Maria Fusaro, Professor & PK-3 ECE Credential Program Coordinator, San José State University

# #5

## SHAPING THE FUTURE

Greater support for PK-3 learners is the key to laying a strong foundation for success and helping every young child realize their full potential in school and throughout life. Now is the time to act.

- **The PK-3 years are an incredible time of growth and opportunity.** Research tells us that high-quality early learning experiences during this time have important benefits for young children. These experiences help to build a range of cognitive, language, social-emotional, and self-regulation skills that set the stage for all future learning, development, and overall well-being.<sup>7</sup>
- **Access to supported, skilled, and knowledgeable teachers is one of the most powerful drivers of children's development and success.**<sup>8</sup> The PK-3 ECE Credential is a key step to preparing expert educators whose impact during this time can profoundly shape children's learning experiences, boost academic achievement, and support positive long-term outcomes.
- **The moment is here, and now is the time to act.** Expanding opportunities, strengthening policies, and increasing investment will be essential to grow and sustain the PK-3 ECE Credential Programs. With this innovative credential, we are able to reimagine and strengthen the educator pipeline to build a dynamic, well-prepared early childhood workforce ready to meet the needs of young learners. Together, we can transform early learning and give every child the strong start they deserve. The PK-3 ECE Credential is more than a program—it's a collective commitment to the next generation and to building a brighter future for California.

*"California already has one of the most talented and diverse workforces that work with young children. This is our opportunity to leverage the workforce we have now to make it stronger—to make the workforce that lives in California, that already reflects the children of California, that already speaks the languages of children in California, that now will be the experts about young children in California."*

Dr. Hilary Seitz, Director of Educator and Leadership Programs, California State University, Office of the Chancellor

TO LEARN MORE

Visit [elp.calstate.edu](http://elp.calstate.edu) for details.

**CSU** The California State University

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8. NAEYC. (2020, March). *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession*. <https://powertotheprofession.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Power-to-Profession-Framework-03312020-web.pdf>