

# *The Campaign for High Quality Early Learning Standards in California and the English Language Learners Preschool Coalition*

*(A Coalition of Concerned Individuals and Organizations)*

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## **Will the Preschool Foundations Close the Achievement Gap or Label More Students as Failures? Superintendent O'Connell's Recent Announcement/Initiatives Dismissed Input from Early Childhood Educators and Experts**

Los Angeles, CA (January 23, 2008): Yesterday's release of the Preschool Foundations by State Superintendent of Instruction Jack O'Connell was one of the centerpieces of his "ambitious plan for closing the achievement gap". While great efforts have been taken to seek input from the early education field, there is considerable disagreement from early childhood education professionals as to the appropriateness of these foundations. Over the last two years, O'Connell refused to seriously consider their concerns about the proposed Preschool Foundations and ignored recommendations from a wide range of educators, experts and childcare providers of preschool age children.

"As they stand now the Foundations don't address how young children learn, omit best educational practices and may steer teachers and publishers to implement developmentally inappropriate instruction," states Alan Guttman, Director, Childhood Development Programs, Claremont School District. According to O'Connell's plan there are over 180 Foundations that preschool students are expected to master within a one or two year period depending upon when the child enrolls.

"In response to Superintendent O'Connell's brief acknowledgment of the importance of play in a child's development, his assurance that the "foundations" will be "playfully" implemented, give little consolation to the many who are concerned about the actual threat these foundations are to children's play. This push down of skill driven standards will not reduce the achievement gap, but will surely create earlier school failures, more obesity, lowered self esteem and negative feelings about school and learning. The time for a child to

play to learn, grow and makes sense of his world must be protected,” states Marilyn McGrath, President-Elect CAEYC and Community College Faculty.

In Los Angeles Unified School District 70% of the preschoolers come from non-English speaking homes. The researchers who developed the Language and Literacy Foundations confirmed that the research and content of the Foundations were targeted for students who are native English speakers and did not consider the very unique needs of children of non-English speaking parents. “Our research and experience with English Learners in K-12 settings tell us that everything that we have been doing to push for a rapid transition to English is shortsighted. Because we have not built on the child’s home language, we have failed in helping them to acquire the English language. This particular oversight is clearly counter to yesterday’s call by Superintendent O’Connell for a more culturally sensitive approach to narrow the achievement gap,” states Yolie Flores Aguilar, School Board Member, Los Angeles Unified School District

“From day one students who do not speak English are put at a disadvantage with the Foundations released by Superintendent O’Connell. For example, one Foundation states that by 60 months of age, students speak clearly with correct pronunciation. “My fear is that a reasonable outcome is that a child who is just learning English will be labeled a failure or not ready for kindergarten if they cannot speak like a native English speaker after one year of preschool as required by this Foundation” states Antonia Lopez, Director Early Care and Childhood Education, National Council of La Raza.

The Superintendent opposed a compromise presented by *The Campaign for High Quality Early Learning Standards in California and the English Language Learners Preschool Coalition* comprised of over 30 organizations and many individual experts throughout the state. The compromise addressed the three most onerous issues; a continuum to show incremental growth versus high stakes targets, reducing the number of Foundations to allow teachers sufficient time to focus on the developmental progress of each individual child, and the lack of a research-based approach to address the needs of English learners in language and literacy.

The *Coalition* believes in high quality Foundations for preschoolers but these Foundations, as published, fail to meet this standard and continue to undermine the efforts of children of many non-English speaking parents. The *Coalition* calls for the State Superintendent to address these concerns in his proposed legislation to consolidate all of California’s preschool programs and through the development of frameworks and guides that ensure equal opportunity and access to all of California’s preschool children, regardless of their home language .

*The Campaign for High Quality Early Learning Standards and the English Language Learner Preschool Coalition is a Coalition of over 200 individuals and organizations concerned over the well being of California’s children.*

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