

Moving to Universal Pre-K – LAUSD in a Wider Ecology

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State Context and Local Challenges

Gov. Newsom and legislative leaders...

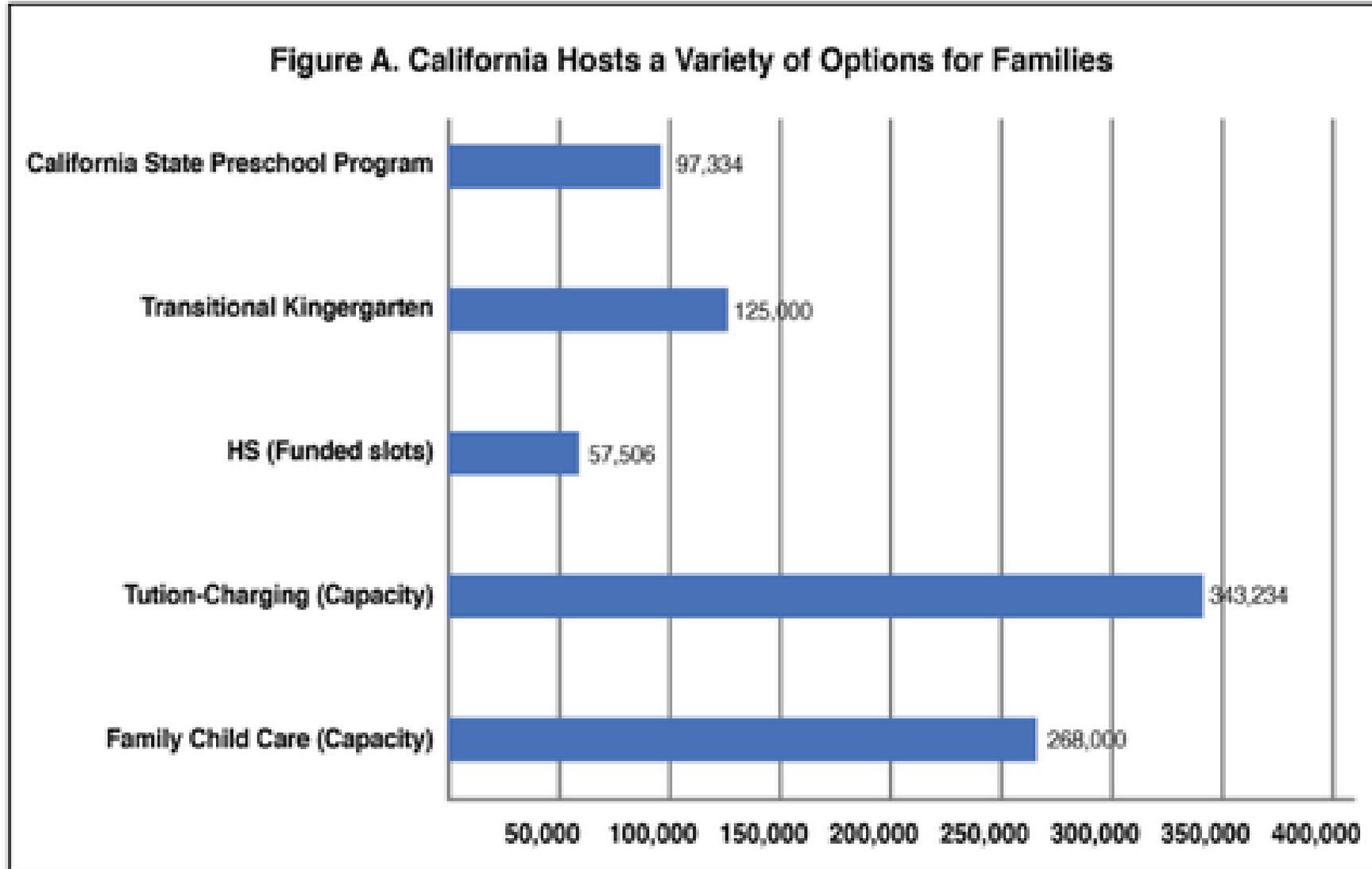
- Continue to invest in pre-K for 4-year-olds (two-thirds enr'd).
- Prioritizing parental choice (voucher growth).
- Unaware of interplay among ECE programs.
- Episodic focus on quality and child-level benefits.

Local challenges... wider access, quality, gauging child outcomes...

- TK rebounding countywide, but not State Preschool or Head Start.
- Slight shift to 2-3-year-olds in State Preschool (CSPP).
- Big unknown: quality of providers/classrooms, relationships, results!

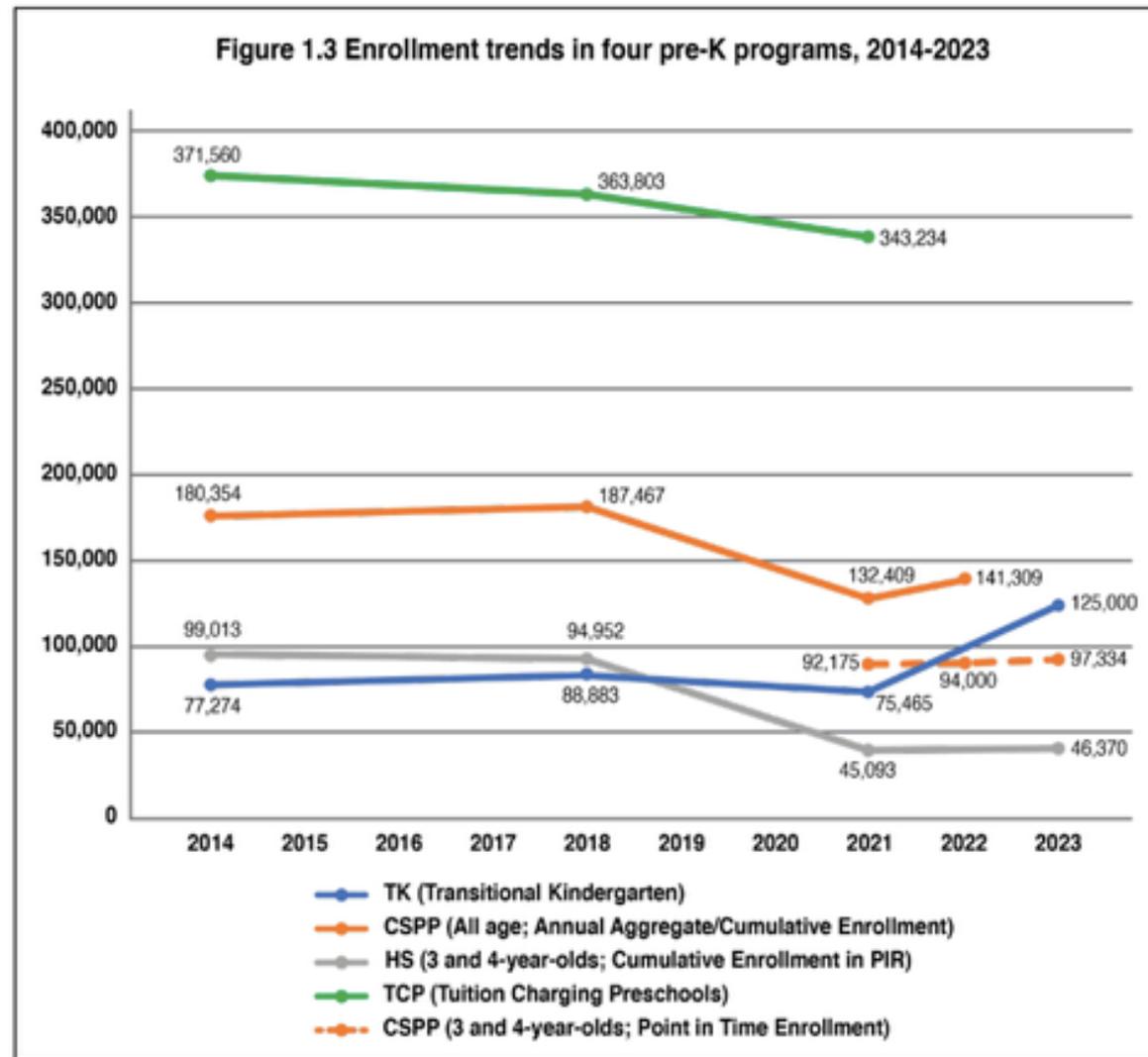


California's Ecology – Interplay of Pre-K Options for Families



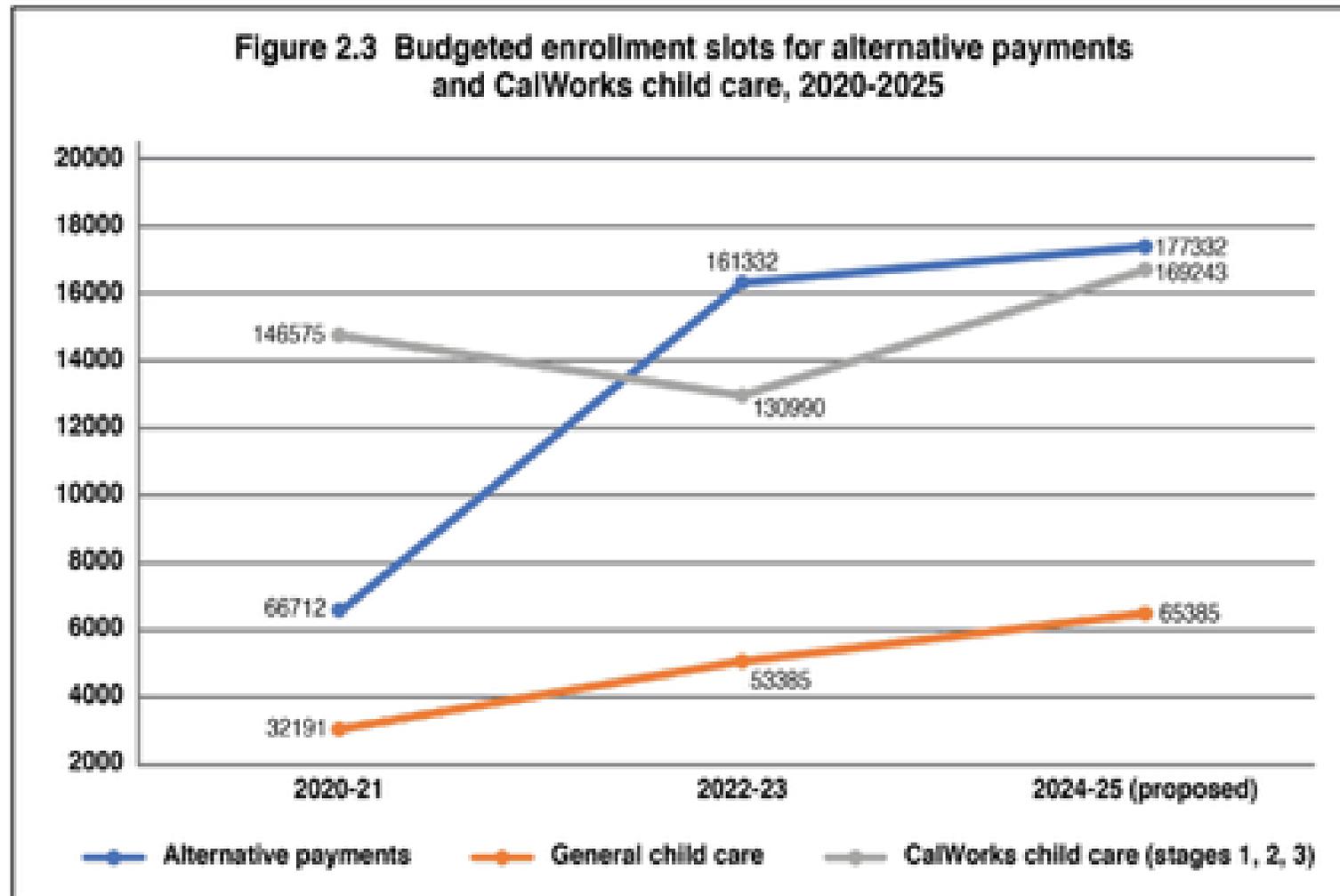
But Post-Covid – Pre-K Programs Have Rebounded Unevenly Statewide

- ▶ Head Start enrollments remain depressed
- ▶ State Preschool (CSPP) shows little growth
- ▶ slight shift to 3 year-olds in CSPP as TK grows



Child-care / Pre-K Vouchers Have Grown Dramatically Statewide

L.A. County... voucher recipients have doubled since 2022, one-fifth of these families opting for a pre-K center



Trade-Offs among Programs – Are We Expanding Access Overall?

California-wide –

- *TK* has grown from 99,000 four-year-olds in 2019 to 151,000 last fall (2024).
- But *Head Start* enrollments (3's and 4's) dropped from 88,000 to 46,000.
- State Preschool (*CSPP*) remained flat.
- Capacity in *tuition-charging* pre-K's fell by nearly 10,000 slots

L.A. County –

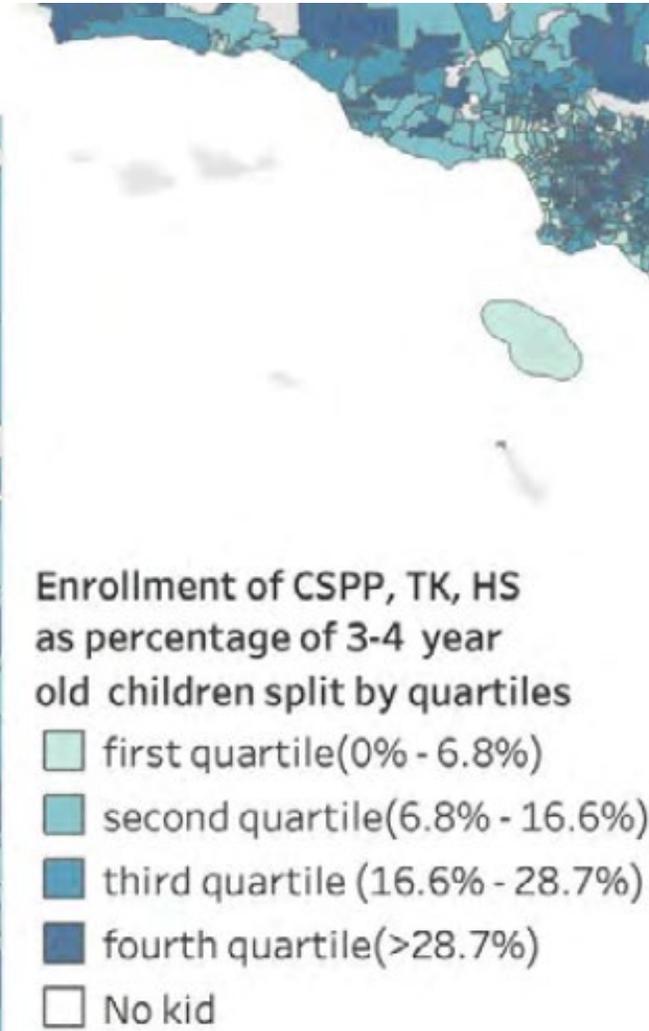
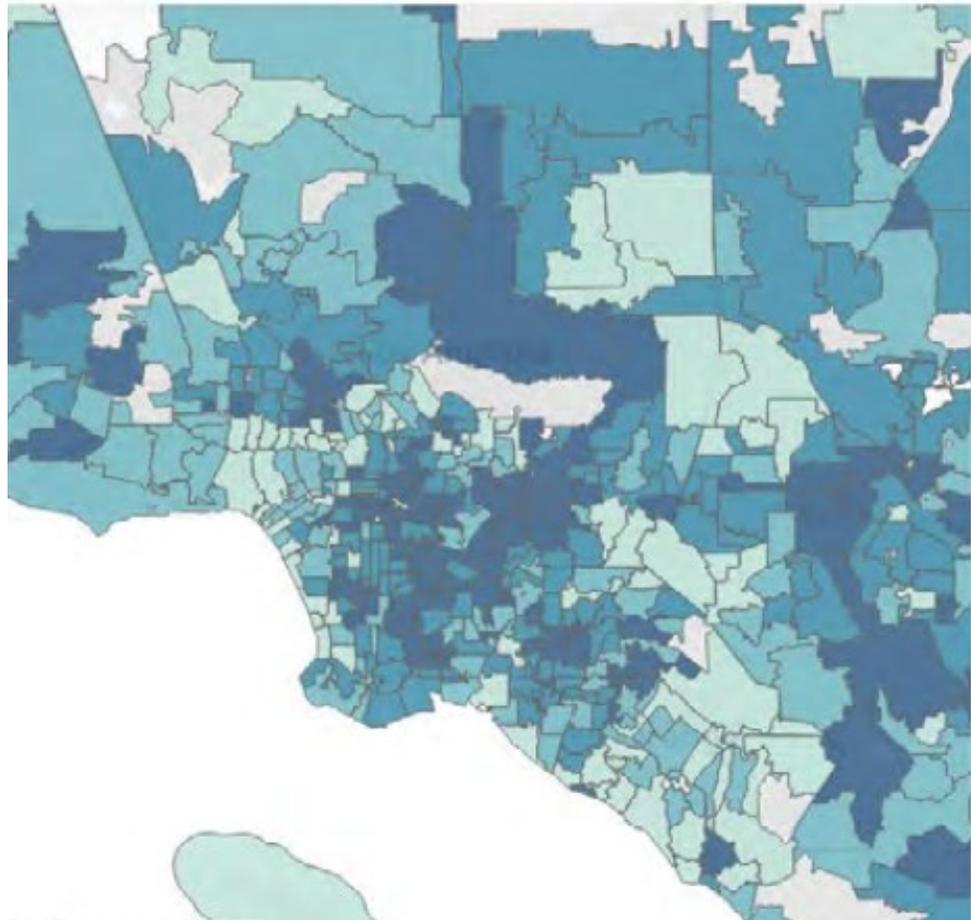
- *TK* moved from 26,000 four-year-olds in 2019 to nearly 24,000 in 2023 (then up in fall 2024).
- State Preschool (*CSPP*) fell from 26,000 to 17,000.
- *Head Start* remains down.



Pre-K Centers Reach Over Two-Thirds of All 4-year-olds Statewide... and progressively distributed in southern California

But supply remains scarce for 3-year-olds, about *one-third* of income-eligible families enrolled in L.A.

Los Angeles Area



Enrollment of CSPP, TK, HS
as percentage of 3-4 year
old children split by quartiles

- first quartile(0% - 6.8%)
- second quartile(6.8% - 16.6%)
- third quartile (16.6% - 28.7%)
- fourth quartile(>28.7%)
- No kid

As TK grows, why are pre-K's not shifting to 3's and 2's ?



- Family reticence over children's health and large institutions in general?
- Teacher shortage, scarcity of classroom aides (and demand keeps growing).
- Income-eligibility caps (which LAUSD is addressing), serving additional middle-class 4's ?
- Hold-harmless provision for CSPP pre-K still in labor contract (due to expire in June).
- Ongoing decline in the tuition-charging sector.

We know little about variation in quality and benefits for children

- How does quality compare among types of providers, as public investment grows for kith, kin, and licensed homes.
- Pre-K centers: Variation in the qualities of classroom activities, teacher ECE experience changing (while providing upward mobility for teachers)?
- TK: How is staffing evolving in LAUSD? State now requiring a 10:1 child-adult ratio. Principal leadership?
- Which children benefit? LAUSD holds the data to track children moving through CSPP, TK, and Early Learning Centers... which would clarify which elements of quality lift children (AB 22).



Next steps for LAUSD and early-childhood partners



- Lead from the district's rich experience and leadership. Show how more 3 year-olds (and 2's) can be served with high quality.
- Consider the broad ecology of providers... partner with nonprofit pre-K's for wrap-around and full-day care.
- Deepen ties with family child-care networks to help improve quality for kids before they enter LAUSD.
- Follow children over time to learn about what's working and which children truly benefit over time.

A huge dollop of thanks to Cristina Alvarado, Debra Colman and their generous staff, who provided much of the data on which the Berkeley analysis is based. Holly Ondyak codirected this study. Austin Land is our constant advisor along the way. Much of the data analysis was conducted by Qifan Zhang and Julia Zhou.

Note: I have not addressed the immediate loss of child care and pre-K capacity in Altadena or the Palisades. LAUSD leaders could move policy priorities as reconstruction is planned in these areas.

Detailed findings for Los Angeles County appear in this Berkeley [brief](#).

