

California Supporting Providers and Reaching Kids (CalSPARK)

Historically, child care data has been spread among a variety of sources at the State, local, private, and non-profit levels. The system has lacked uniform State oversight, which resulted in inequitable supports to localities across the state. To fill the voids in the system, Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies and Alternative Payment Programs (APPs), spearheaded by the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network (the Network) and California Alternative Payment Program Association (CAPPA) stepped up to support the child care workforce and families. The multitude of services R&Rs and APPs provide have revolutionized the way parents and families access and are empowered to understand all of the child care and development options available to them.

Building upon the significant steps R&Rs and APPs have made, there is more the State can do to further modernize the system. The child care and development workforce is currently offered little to no support from the State in managing their caseload regardless of whether they serve children receiving subsidies or not. Many, especially smaller providers in areas with marginalized populations, are left no choice but to manually collect, store, and organize caseload information. This administrative burden placed on the workforce impacts their ability to process attendance sheets and invoices, project their caseload/capacity, and provide quality care to the children and families they serve.

CDSS's role in the administration of child care programs was transformed by the statutory transfer of 16 Child Care and Development (CCD) programs, including family child care homes and center based care, as well as one food and nutrition program currently administered by the California Department of Education (CDE) to CDSS on July 1, 2021. This new responsibility, coupled with CCD programs that CDSS already administers, such as CalWORKs Stage One Child Care and licensing of child care facilities, places CDSS in a unique position to work with the stakeholders well versed in the needs and environment today to transform the current child care and development landscape.

By working collaboratively and proactively, the State, R&Rs, APPs, the workforce, families and other private and non-profit organizations will fulfill a shared vision to support California's youngest and most vulnerable residents with human-centered and data-driven approaches to serve, aid, and protect their whole family. In alignment with the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care, CDSS intends to address the gaps in the system by updating the child care data infrastructure, and launching a provider-first technology solution, referred to as California Supporting Providers and Reaching Kids (CalSPARK).

CalSPARK:

- Will be an operations-focused toolset and data intake pipeline owned and administered by CDSS.
- Supports the workforce so they can effectively navigate the administrative functions of managing their caseload and engaging with local program administrators, the state, and others.
- Anticipates data collection supported through this solution includes child-specific attendance, total enrollment, payment of family fees, state contracts and real time schedule availability.
- Complements the robust support R&Rs and APPs provide to families by feeding data forward to them in a supportive administrative structure.

Vital to successful implementation of CalSPARK will be a robust stakeholder engagement and business discovery process that will ensure a comprehensive list of requirements is developed.

Attached is CDSS's proposal for the initial phase of engagement, including a timeline for accomplishing this plan.