



Nurturing Black Brilliance

Creating Positive Transitional Kindergarten Spaces for Black Children in California

February 2026

Purpose

Uplift promising practices that affirm & center Black children in TK classrooms



Our Missions



The Center for District Innovation and Leadership in Early Education (DIAL EE) works as a convener, facilitator, policy advocate, connector and partner, to co-create student-centered solutions from the ground up that uphold every child's promise from the start.



Black Californians United for Early Care and Education (BlackECE) is a powerful coalition of advocates, policy-influencers, civil rights organizations, researchers, university faculty, non-profit leaders, early educators, caregivers, providers, families, and community-based organizations.



EdTrust-West is committed to advancing policies and practices to dismantle the racial and economic barriers embedded in the California education system.

1 Setting the Context: Early Learning & Care Landscape

2 Centering Black Children and Their Families in Research

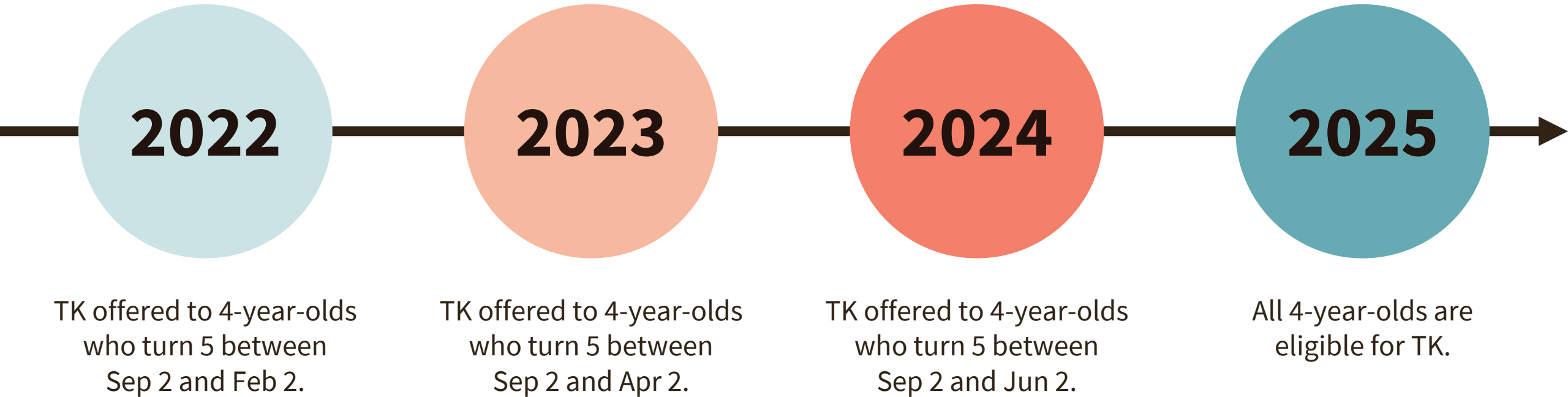
3 Panel Discussion: Promising Practices from District Leaders and Parents



Setting the Context

Early Learning and Care Landscape

California's Timeline: Transitional Kindergarten Expansion



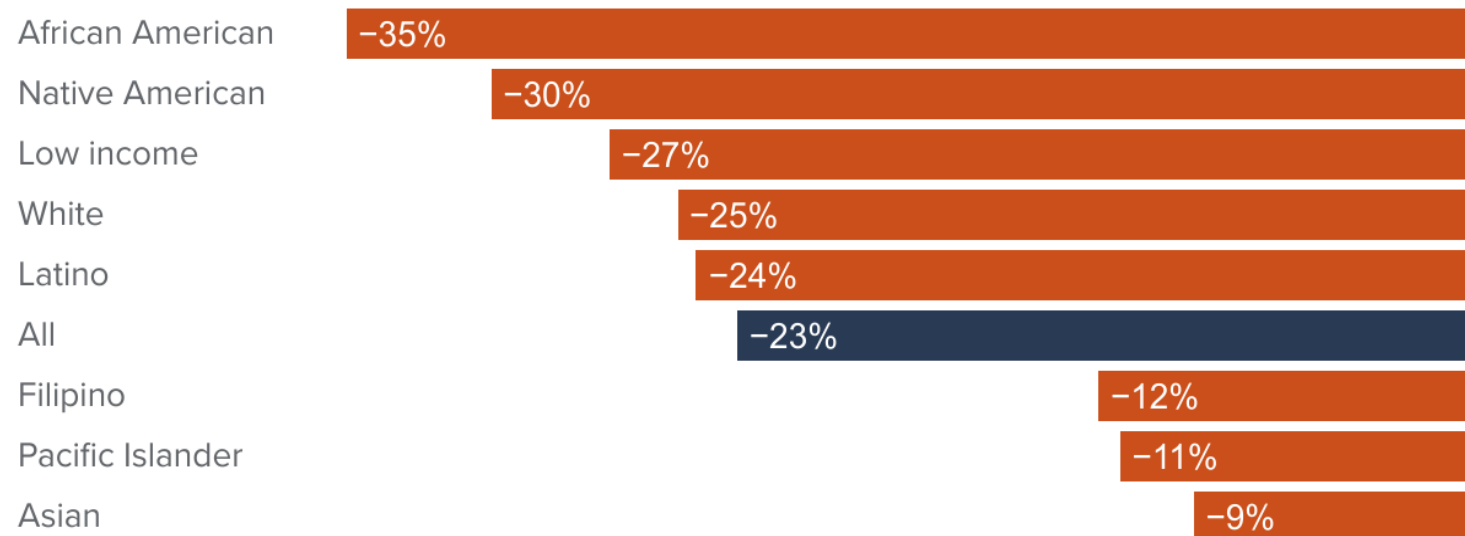
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NEWS RELEASE

**“Even as overall enrollment has fallen,
TK enrollment continues to boom,
with a year-over-year increase of 17.2 percent.”**

But early evaluations of TK pre-expansion reveal troubling equity gaps in enrollment

African American and Native American children had the largest enrollment declines

Percent change in transitional kindergarten enrollment

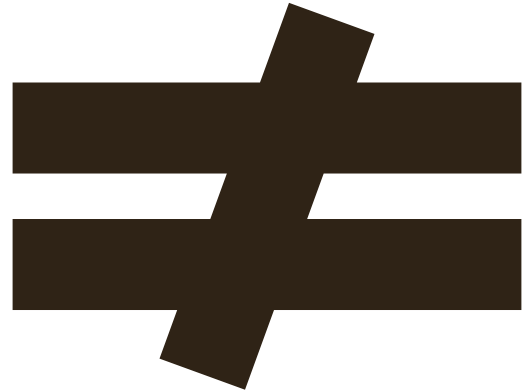


SOURCE: Authors' calculations from the California Department of Education's Dataquest.

NOTES: Enrollment changes from 2019-20 to 2020-21.

FROM: PPIC Blog, June 2022.

Universal



High-Quality + Equitable Outcomes

Centering Black Children and Their Families in Research

Questions, Approaches, and Early Findings

What do Black families need and want from California's transitional kindergarten programs?

Enrollment data and estimates of eligible students

Research Questions

1. How has **TK uptake** for Black families changed across the state as eligibility has expanded?
2. Where are Black families currently sending their young children for care and early education, and **why**?
 1. When choosing an early learning and care program, what were parent/caregivers' **top priorities**?
 2. What would an **ideal early learning and care program** look like from Black parent/caregivers' perspectives?
3. For Black families with children enrolled in TK, what is their **current experience**?
 1. Are they satisfied with their program? If so, why?
 2. If not, what do Black families want from TK for their children?



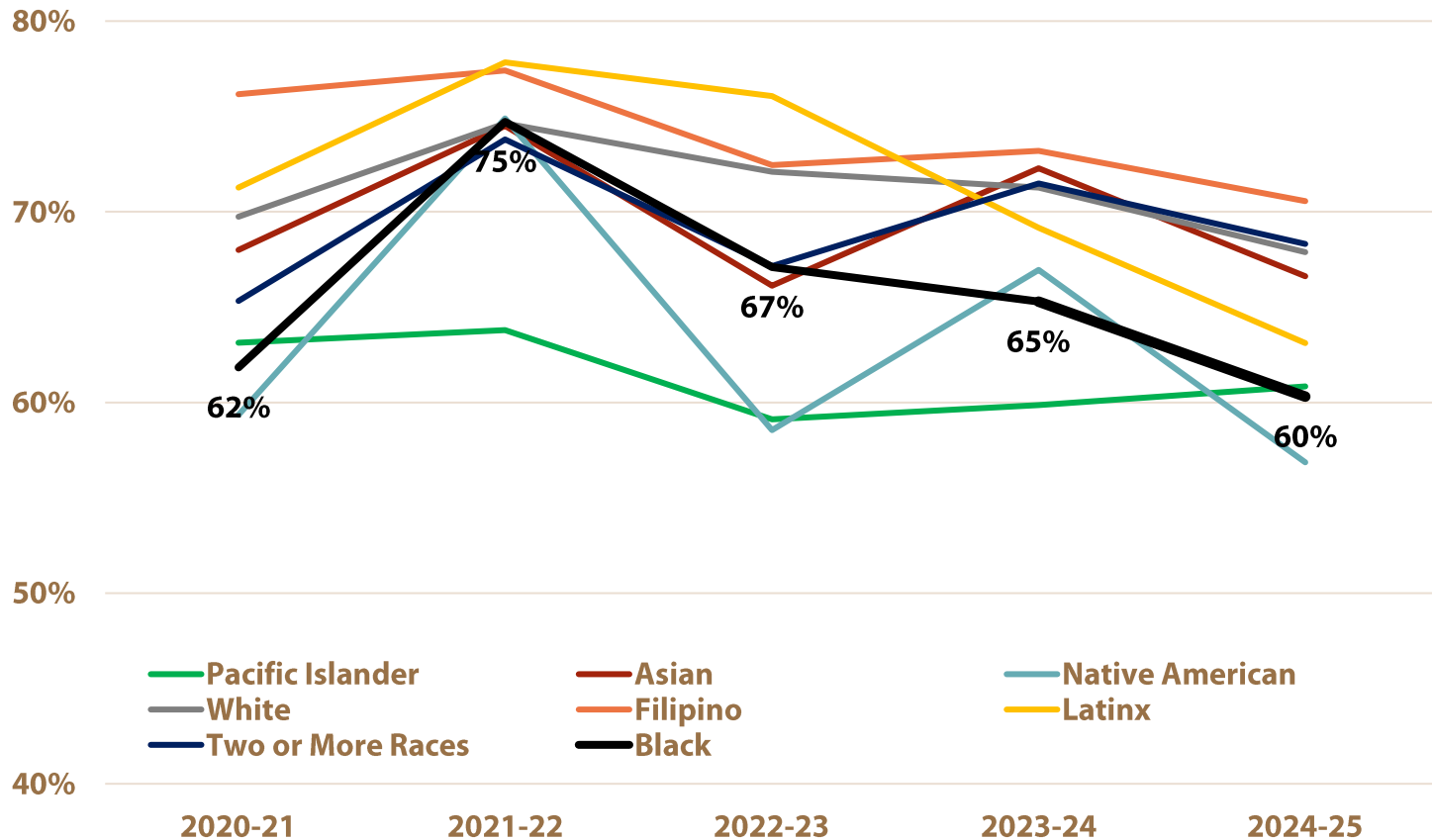
Qualitative research using RAPID survey data and focus groups

Enrollment Trends & Access

Using Enrollment Data to Understand
Participation Trends and Geographical Access

Black TK uptake has declined throughout expansion, and remains the one of the lowest rates

TK Participation Rate by Race/Ethnicity



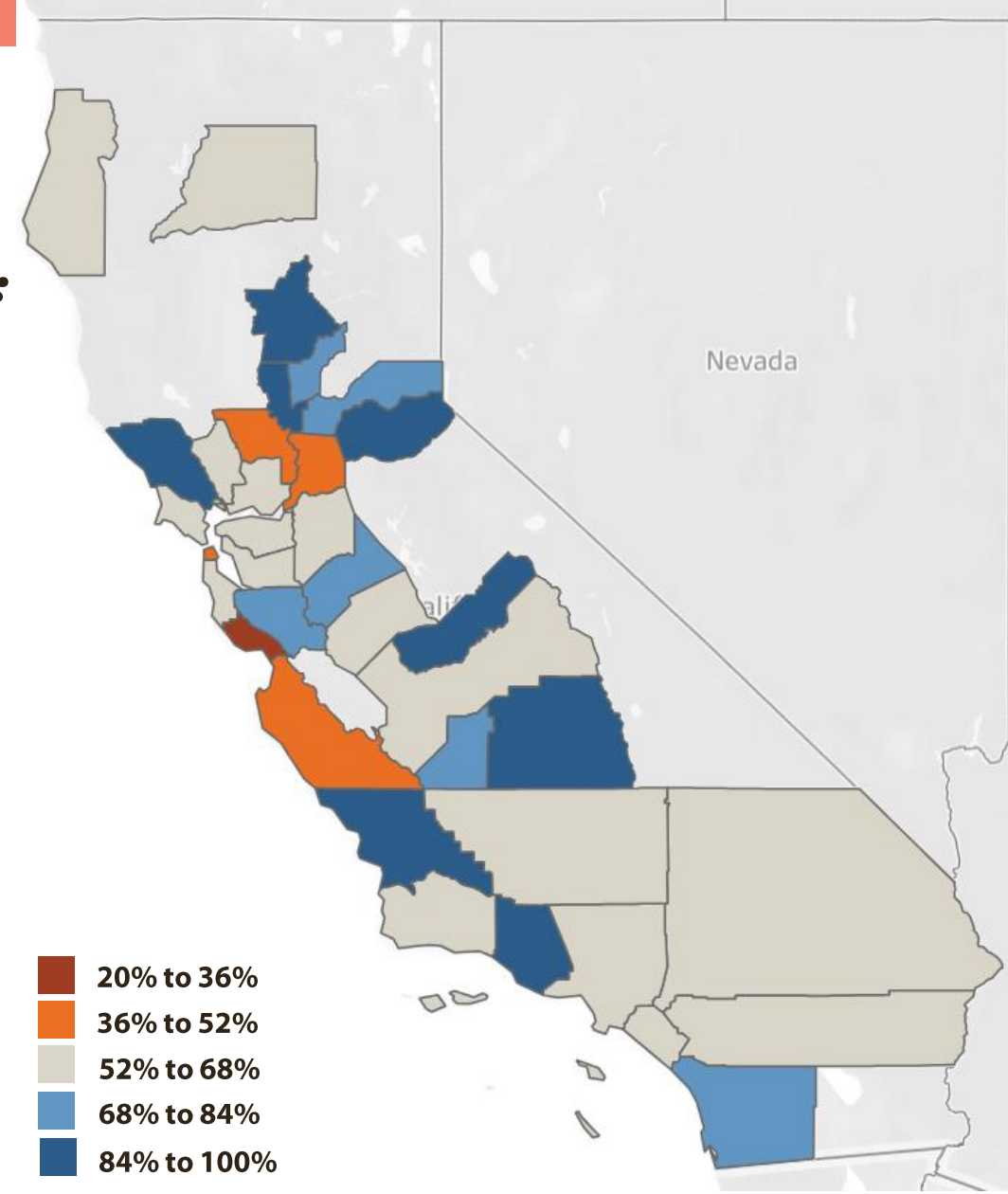
Only **60% of eligible Black 4-year-olds** are enrolled in TK compared to 68% of white and 71% of Filipino eligible 4-year-olds.

Source: EdTrust-West analysis of California Department of Education Transitional Kindergarten Program Participation data (2024-25) | To calculate TK uptake, EdTrust-West estimated the number of eligible four-year-olds by using public school Kindergarten enrollment, scaled by the share of qualifying birthdays in the given year.

Black TK uptake is uneven across the state's counties, ranging from 29% to over 100%*

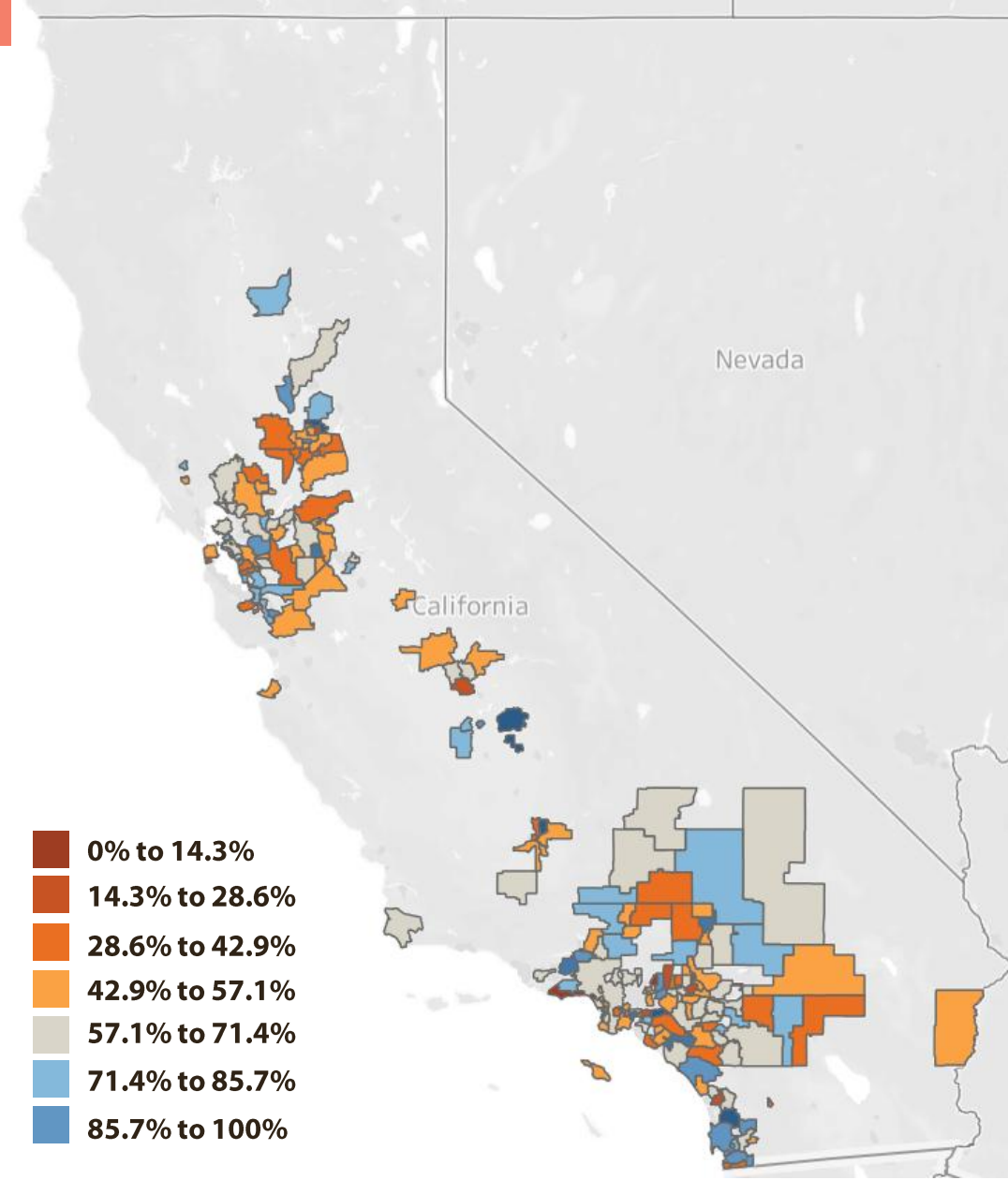
Some takeaways:

- Sacramento County serves a large population of the state's young Black children, but enrolls in TK only 47% of eligible Black four-year-olds.
- Of the counties that serve a substantial Black population, most have Black uptake rates at or below the statewide average, with only San Diego County with a significantly higher rate, 78%.



Source: EdTrust-West analysis of California Department of Education [Transitional Kindergarten Program Participation data \(2024-25\)](#) | Only counties with at least 10 Black Kindergartners are included, because the estimation of the number of eligible 4-year-olds is less accurate at smaller scales. The estimation is also why some counties have participation rates over 100%.

Black TK uptake rates vary widely even between districts within the same county

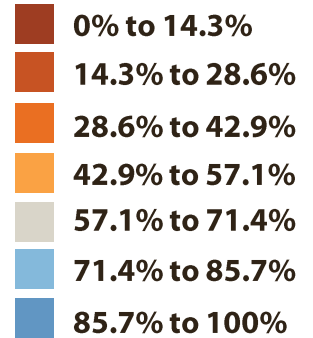
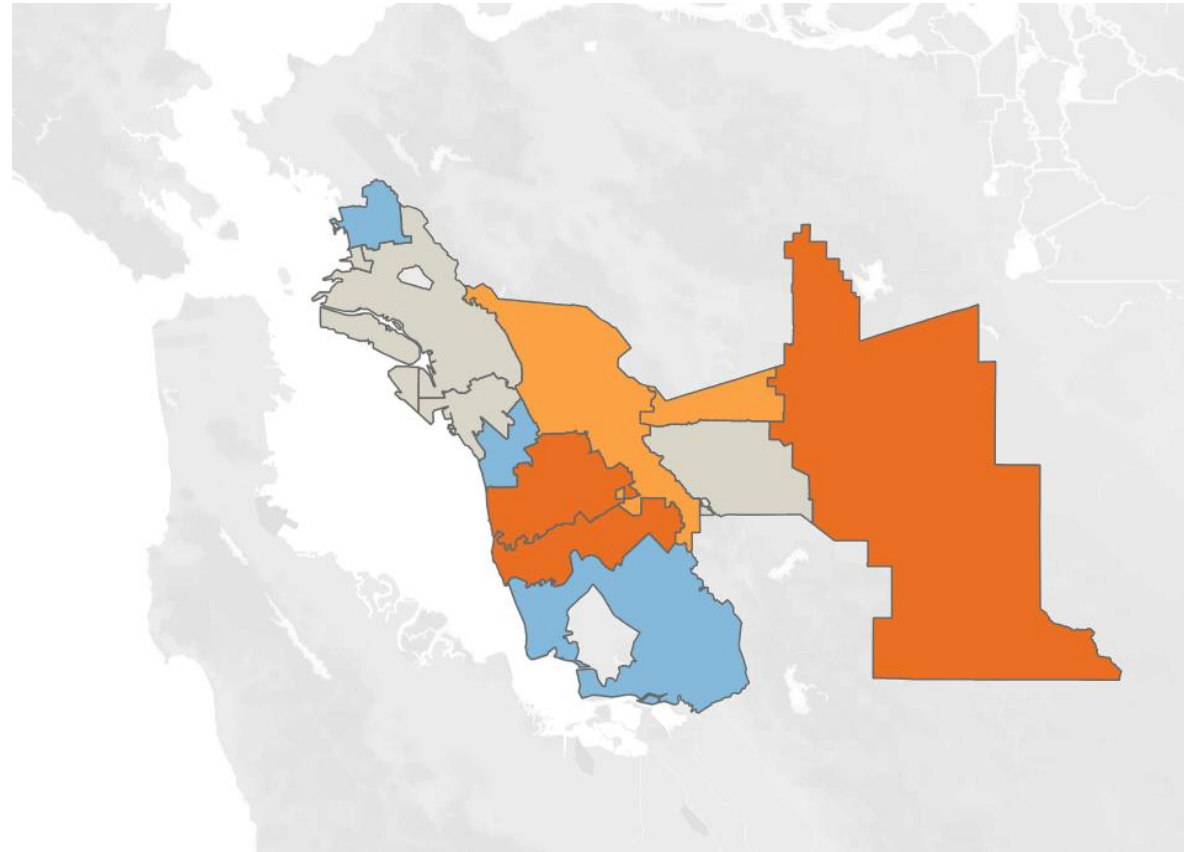


Source: EdTrust-West analysis of California Department of Education Transitional Kindergarten [Program Participation data](#) (2024-25) | Only districts with at least 10 Black Kindergartners are included, because the estimation of the number of eligible 4-year-olds is less accurate at smaller scales. The estimation is also why some districts have participation rates over 100%.

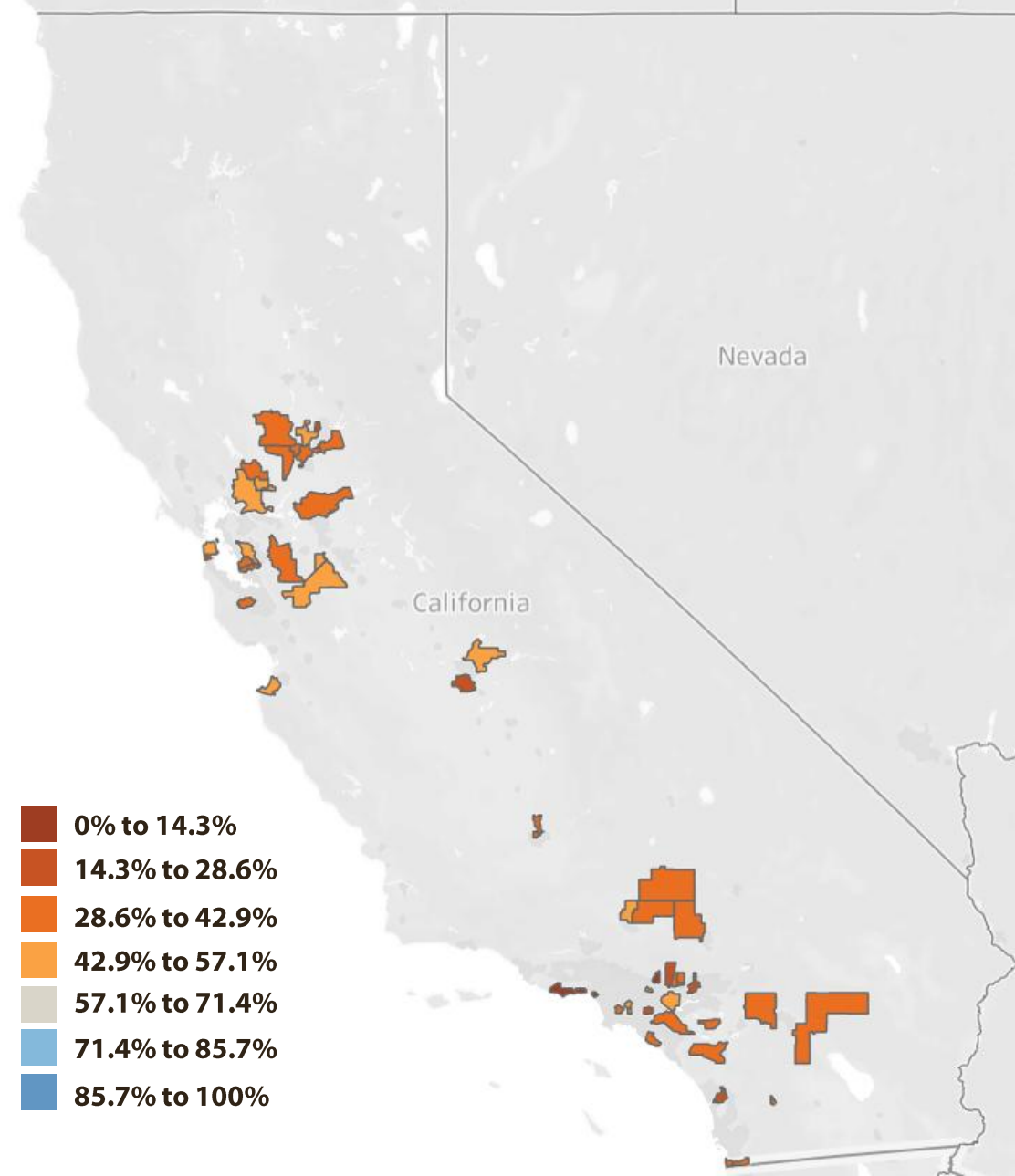
Black TK uptake rates vary widely even between districts within the same county

Some takeaways:

- For instance, Alameda County appears to have a Black uptake rate that is roughly the statewide average, but there are districts with uptake rates as high as 78% and as low as 28%.



The bottom quarter of districts see 47% or fewer eligible Black four-year-olds enroll in TK



Source: EdTrust-West analysis of California Department of Education Transitional Kindergarten [Program Participation data](#) (2024-25) | Only districts with at least 10 Black Kindergartners are included, because the estimation of the number of eligible 4-year-olds is less accurate at smaller scales. The estimation is also why some districts have participation rates over 100%.

Access to TK Classrooms

As of 2024-25, over **9 in 10** eligible Black children have TK in their school zone.

- The percent of eligible Black children with TK at their local school (93%) is about the same as the percent of all eligible children (92%).

Access to TK classrooms for Black families has **increased** over the past five years.

- The percent of eligible Black children with TK at their local school has increased 15 percentage points, from 78% in 2019-20.



And yet, **only 6 in 10** eligible Black four-year-olds are enrolled in TK.

Source: EdTrust-West analysis of California Department of Education Transitional Kindergarten [Program Participation data](#) (2024-25 and 2019-20)

Understanding Experiences & Preferences

Using Survey Data & Focus Groups to Explore
What Black Families Need & Want from ECE

Freedom, Joy, & Exploration

Black parents value ELC spaces that cultivate joy, freedom, and exploration.

When asked to describe their ideal ELC setting, a Black parent responded, “Black children...have this innate joy, but...the school system does something to our kids where they lose that joy...It's all about coming up with a solution where there's that sustained **joy**, that sustained **curiosity**, that sustained **pleasure** or **excitement** about learning throughout their academic careers...and it really starts at this foundational point in their lives.”

“[Black children] are already forced to grow up so fast and are...treated as older...Can they just **play**? Can they just be? Why are we forcing them to learn Kindergarten curriculum?”

Participants described “a safe place of **exploration**” and “freedom, [the] ability to move without restriction.”

TK spaces must actively disrupt racist disciplinary practices to create affirming, joyful spaces:

3 in 10 Black parents surveyed did not agree that TK staff have an **appropriate approach to behavior management**.

Source: EdTrust-West analysis of RAPID Survey data, [Stanford Center on Early Childhood, Stanford University \(2024\)](#). Survey responses are from 148 participants surveyed since 2023. | Quotes were drawn from EdTrust-West focus group data.

Diversity & Shared Culture

Black parents value diversity and shared culture within their ELC settings and face a lack of diversity in TK spaces.

“We intentionally chose our school...because about **20-30% of students are Black** and about 20% are multiracial...and there's a very **high number of Black educators.**”

Research shows that the ECE workforce is much more diverse than the TK-12 teacher workforce.* FCC and center staff are comprised largely of women of color, 67% and 63% respectively, compared to only 39% teachers of color in California schools.

When asked about negative experiences with TK, a participant described: “My daughter goes to a school where she is literally the **only non-white child** in class...[and] her teacher is the only Black teacher in the school.”

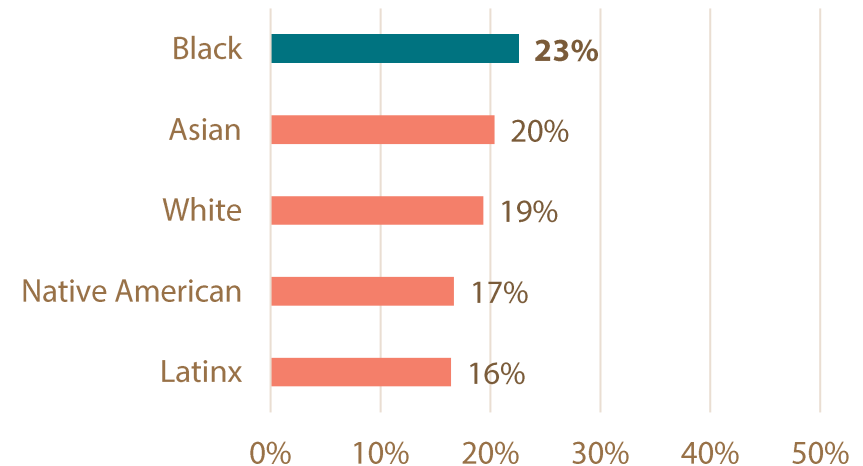
Source: EdTrust-West analysis of RAPID Survey data, [Stanford Center on Early Childhood, Stanford University \(2024\)](#), [Center for the Study on Child Care Employment at Berkeley \(2022\)](#) | Quotes were drawn from EdTrust-West focus group data. | Data on the demographics of TK teachers is not made available by CDE.

Community & Authentic Engagement

Parent-teacher partnerships, communication, and parent communities are especially important for Black parents.

“ Participants with children in TK elevated their positive experiences with TK classrooms and teachers fostering strong parent communities and facilitating communication through regular check-ins via text and WhatsApp **group chat**, a **parent council**, and **monthly lunch meetings**.

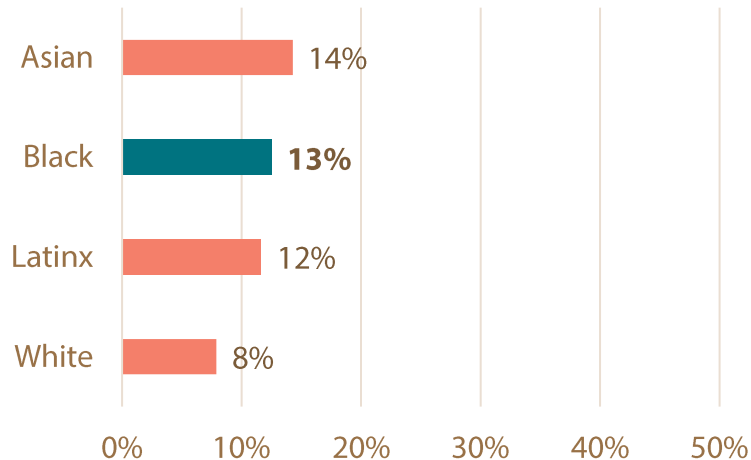
Black parents/caregivers taking the RAPID survey were **most likely** to indicate staff relationship-building and engagement with families as an important factor when choosing their ELC.



Source: EdTrust-West analysis of RAPID Survey data, [Stanford Center on Early Childhood, Stanford University \(2024\)](#). Survey responses from 991 participants, asked in regards to the 2023-24 school year. | Quotes were drawn from EdTrust-West focus group data.

Accessibility & Affordability

The affordability and accessibility of ECE programs is important for Black parents. Though TK is presented as a free ECE option, ensuring full-day care leads to added cost.



The lack of before/after school care was **more likely** to be a factor against TK for parents/caregivers of color.

“I want to put them in the best facility possible, but our society is set up for us to not really be there for our children because we have to make the money to provide for our children, so it’s just a matter of: **where can I have my children [go] so my wife and I can go employ ourselves to actually provide?**”

25%

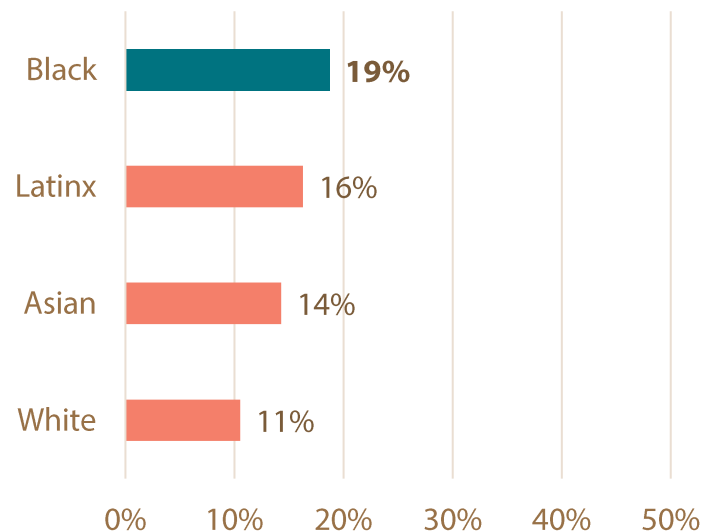
of Black parents do not agree that **TK covers the hours they are at work.**

Source: EdTrust-West analysis of RAPID Survey data, [Stanford Center on Early Childhood, Stanford University \(2024\)](#). Survey responses from 991 participants, asked in regards to the 2023-24 school year. | Quotes were drawn from EdTrust-West focus group data.

Community-Centered Implementation

Black parents value their ECE setting, often led by providers of color who have long-served the local Black community. Negative impacts of TK expansion on the mixed-delivery system (staffing shortages, shift in child ages) disproportionately affect people of color, who make up the majority of ECE providers.

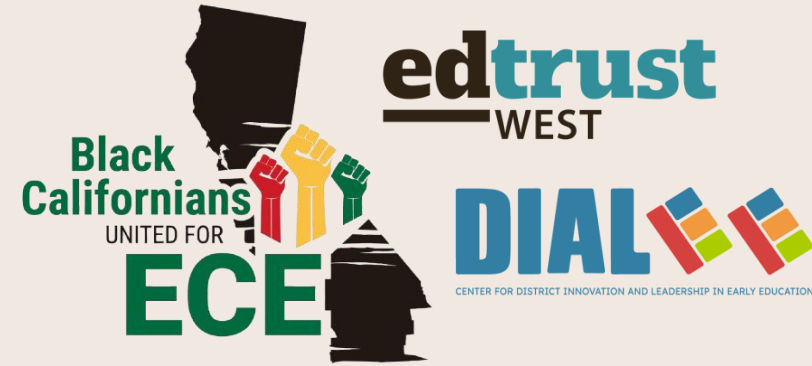
“It would have been more valuable to adequately fund the **current mixed-delivery system** and not have TK...if the state would've increased funding for our preschool programs instead of TK, I think that would've made more sense than introducing TK.”



Black parents/caregivers, and parents/caregivers of color in general, were most likely to say that **wanting their child to stay in their current childcare arrangement** is a primary reason for why they do not plan to send their child to TK.

Source: EdTrust-West analysis of RAPID Survey data, [Stanford Center on Early Childhood, Stanford University \(2024\)](#). Survey responses from 124 participants, asked about 2024-25 school year. | Quotes were drawn from EdTrust-West focus group data.

Components	Recommendations for LEAs	Theme(s) Addressed
Learning Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically affirming instructional materials that align with the California Preschool/ Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations (PTKLF) Build school and district administrators’ capacity on developmentally appropriate, play-based practice for four-year-olds, how to best support TK teachers, and funding mechanisms to provide full-day care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom, Joy, & Exploration Accessibility & Affordability
Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit and retain Black teachers in TK classrooms by strengthening the PK-3 Early Childhood Education (ECE) Specialist Instruction Credential pipeline, especially for experienced ECE educators who want to become TK teachers Build the capacity of TK teachers to serve Black children and their families by investing in professional development on teaching strategies that recognize and sustain ancestral and community-rooted languages, such as Black Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity and Shared Culture Community & Engagement
Caring for the Whole Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with the local community-based organizations and early childhood providers, including programs funded by CDSS and CDE, who serve Black children and their families, by using state funds to strengthen capacity, offer wrap-around services, and meet family needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDE Administered Grants: Expanded Learning Opportunity Programs (ELO-P), Universal PreKindergarten Planning & Implementation (UPK P&I), UPK Mixed Delivery Planning Grant, Community Schools Partnership CDSS-funded Programs: Find your local ELC programs on the CDSS Child Care and Development Contacts webpage. Leverage cross-agency data to identify care gaps and overlaps, and collaborate with community-based organizations to coordinate and deliver wrap-around services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ELC System Community-Centered



Panel Discussion

Promising Practices From District Leaders

Moderator

Today's Panelists



Keisha Nzewi
Co-founder
& Woman in Charge
Black Californians
United for Early
Care and
Education



Crystal Hawkins
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Shoestrings Children's
Center Early Education
and Elementary
Programs
San Francisco Unified
School District



Colleen McNeil
Occupational Therapist
Shoestrings Children's
Center
San Francisco Unified
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Dr. Kelly Fountain
Director of Early Learning
Lancaster Elementary
School District



Eileen Chen
Superintendent
Robla School District

Q & A

Thank you!

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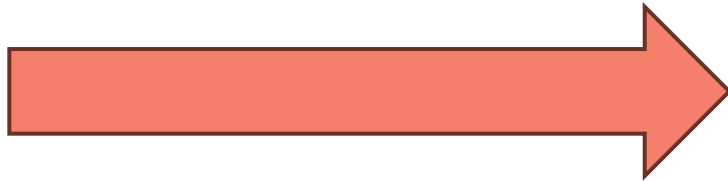
 /The-Education-Trust-West



Resources from today's presentation will be shared in an email!

Invitation: 3-Part Webinar Series The Brilliance and Importance of Affirming Black (English) Language in Early Childhood Education

Check out our
partners' upcoming
webinar series.



blackece.org/blackenglish

February 25 | *Understanding Black
(English) Language: What It Is and
Why It Matters*

May 6 | *Honoring Home
Language: Black (English)
Language, History, and Early
Literacy Development*

July 15 | *From
Recognition to Action:
Policy, Advocacy, and
Black (English)
Language as a
Language*

