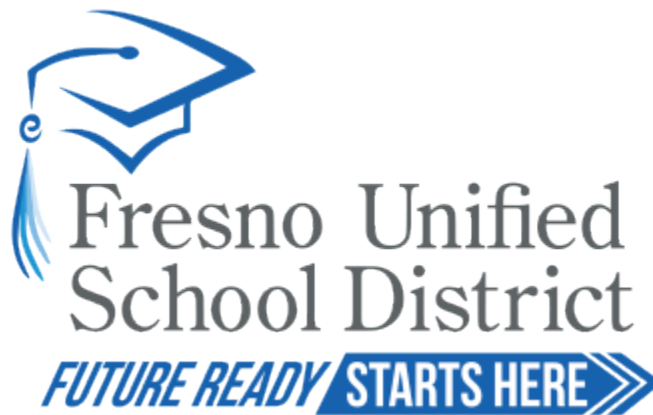




BOARD COMMUNICATIONS - OCTOBER 02, 2026

TO: Members of the Board of Education
FROM: Ben A. Drati, Deputy Superintendent

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Mao Misty Her, Superintendent

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Ben Amuku Drati, Ed.D., Deputy Superintendent

3. OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF
Ambra O'Connor, Chief of Staff

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David Chavez, Chief Officer
8. **OFFICE OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL DIVISION**
Carlos Castillo, Ed.D., Chief Officer
9. **OFFICE OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES**
Paul Idsvoog, Chief Officer
10. **OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY SERVICES**
Paoze Lee, Chief Officer

Board Communications Approved by:
Ben A. Drati, Ed.D., Deputy Superintendent

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'BD', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Fresno Unified School District
Board Communication

From the Office of the Superintendent
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Mao Misty Her, Superintendent

Date: October 02, 2026

Phone Number: (559) 457-3884

Regarding: Superintendent Calendar Highlights

The purpose of this communication is to inform the Board of notable calendar items:

- Made nine classroom visits at the following sites: Birney, Farber, Jackson, Vang Pao, and Winchell
- Traveled to Boston to attend the Harvard Fall Return Campus Visit as part of the Harvard Resident ED.L.D. program

If you have any questions about the information in this communication, or require further information, please contact Misty Her at (559) 457-3884.

Cabinet Approval: 

Name and Title: Mao Misty Her, Superintendent

Fresno Unified School District
Board Communication

From the Office of the Superintendent
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Vicente Cantu, Manager III

Date: October 02, 2026

Phone Number: 457-3825

Regarding: Local Control and Accountability Plan Educational Partner Engagement

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board with an update on the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) Educational Partner Engagement process for the 2026/27 school year, which builds upon the updated plan developed last year.

To provide meaningful and ongoing engagement with educational partners, Fresno Unified School District will continue the LCAP Educational Partner Engagement strategy implemented last year in response to feedback regarding survey fatigue, limited feedback, and barriers to in-person participation. The district will continue incorporating the LCAP survey question into the Fall Climate and Culture Survey, an approach that increased participation from approximately 8,000–10,000 respondents in previous LCAP surveys to approximately 41,000 respondents. The district will also continue providing engagement opportunities at both the district and school-site levels. Key engagement strategies for the 2026/27 LCAP include:

- **Climate and Culture Survey:** The District incorporated an open-ended LCAP question into the Fall Climate and Culture Survey to streamline data collection, reduce survey fatigue, and increase opportunities for meaningful input. A detailed analysis of the survey results will be shared with the Board in a Spring 2027 Board Communication
- **Family Engagement Hour:** Supporting Family Engagement Hour meetings held at school sites across the district, providing accessible, site-level opportunities for parents and guardians to share feedback, learn about District priorities, and engage directly in the LCAP process
- **Districtwide LCAP Community Engagement Night:** A districtwide LCAP Community Engagement Night will be held on Thursday, October 15, at 5:30 p.m. at the Farber Professional Learning Center. The meeting will provide families and community members with an opportunity to engage in dialogue, share input, and provide recommendations related to the LCAP
- **Advisory Committees:** The district will continue engagement with the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC), and Community Advisory Committee (CAC), ensuring continued opportunities for feedback from key advisory groups representing diverse educational partner perspectives
- **Community Schools:** Continued collaboration with Community Schools has expanded access to engagement opportunities and helped tailor discussions to local school contexts. The district is collaborating with Community School Coordinators to continue a targeted focus group model that captures feedback from families and other members of the school community
- **LCAP Parent and Educational Partner Guide:** The LCAP Parent and Educational Partner Guide is available on the district's website and distributed at engagement events. The guide provides a concise summary of the district's LCAP

Together, these efforts support the district's ongoing commitment to meaningful educational partner engagement, continuous improvement, and ensuring that feedback from families, students, staff, and community members informs the development of the LCAP in service of all students.

Included with this communication are flyers for the LCAP Community Engagement Night and the Fall Climate and Culture Survey.

If you have any questions pertaining to the information in this communication, or require additional information, please contact Vicente Cantu at 457-3825.

Cabinet Approval: 

Name and Title: Patrick Jensen, Chief Financial Officer

LCAP Community

engagement night

Join us for an evening of connection, learning, and collaboration as we explore the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) - a vital roadmap for supporting student success in our district.

- Learn how LCAP impacts your child's education
- Share your voice
- Connect with district leaders and community members
- Help shape plans that improve outcomes for all students



THURSDAY
15 OCTOBER 2026



TIME
5:30PM



FARBER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CENTER
1020 S 10TH ST, FRESNO, CA 93702



- Dinner
- Childcare
- Spanish and Hmong interpretation

Climate & CULTURE

Family Survey

Tell us how to improve our schools

Tell us where we need to invest

OPEN NOW!

Deadline: October 23, 2026

Click link for survey: <https://surveys.panoramaed.com/fresno/family>



**Scan the QR Code
to access the
survey!**



This year, your responses directly inform the District's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).

LCAP Noche de *participación comunitaria*

Acompáñenos en una tarde de conexión, aprendizaje y colaboración mientras exploramos el Plan de Control Local y Rendición de Cuentas (LCAP) — una guía fundamental para apoyar el éxito estudiantil en nuestro distrito.

- Aprenda cómo el LCAP impacta la educación de su estudiante
- Comparta su opinión
- Conéctese con líderes del distrito y miembros de la comunidad
- Ayude a desarrollar planes que mejoren los resultados de todos los estudiantes



JUEVES

15 DE OCTUBRE DE 2026



HORA:

5:30PM



FARBER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CENTER

1020 S 10TH ST, FRESNO, CA 93702



- Cena
- Cuidado de niños
- Interpretación al español y hmong

Clima & CULTURA

Encuesta para Familias

Díganos cómo mejorar nuestras escuelas.

Díganos dónde debemos invertir.

¡Abierto Ahora!

Fecha límite: 23 de octubre 2026

Haga clic en el enlace para acceder a la encuesta:

<https://surveys.panoramaed.com/fresno/family>



Escanee el código
QR para acceder a
la encuesta



LCAP HMO KOOM TES

nrog zej zog

Tuaj koom peb rau lub caij tav su uas muaj kev sib tham, kev kawm, thiab kev koom tes kom paub txog qhov Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) — ib txoj kev npaj tseem ceeb los pab txhawb cov menyuam txoj kev vam meej hauv peb lub district.

- Kawm seb LCAP cuam tshuam li cas rau koj tus menyuam txoj kev kawm
- Qhia koj txoj kev xav thiab tswv yim
- Sib tham nrog cov thawj coj hauv district thiab cov tswv cuab hauv zej zog
- Pab koom tes tsim cov kev npaj uas txhim kho kev ua tau zoo rau tag nrho cov menyuam kawm ntawv



THURSDAY
KAUM HLI 15 2026



SIJHAWM
5:30PM



FARBER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CENTER
1020 S 10TH ST, FRESNO, CA 93702



Climate & CULTURE

Tshawb Nug Tsev Neeg

Qhia peb seb yuav txhim kho cov tsev kawm ntawv li cas

Qhia peb seb peb yuav tsum nqis peev rau qhov twg

Qhib TamSim No!

Hnub kawg teb: Kaum Hli Ntuj tim 23, 2026

Nias qhov link rau daim ntawv tshawb nug:
<https://surveys.panoramaed.com/fresno/family>



Thaj qhov QR Code
kom nkag mus teb tau
daim ntawv tshawb
nug!



Xyoo no, koj cov lus teb yuav qhia ncaj qha rau District's
Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).

Fresno Unified School District
Board Communication

From the Office of the Superintendent
To the Members of the Board of Education
Prepared by: Kim Kelstrom, Chief Executive

Date: October 02, 2026
Phone Number: 457-3907

Regarding: School Services Weekly Update Reports for September 25, 2026

The purpose of this communication is to provide the Board a copy of School Services of California's (SSC) Weekly Updates. Each week SSC provides an update and commentary on different educational fiscal issues. In addition, they include different articles related to education issues. The SSC Weekly Updates for September 25, 2026 are attached and include the following articles:

- California Revenues Remain Above Forecast – September 23, 2026
- Many of California's Youngest Students Keep Missing Weeks of School, Data Show – September 24, 2026
- How Trump's Plan to Make Head Start English-Only Would Hit L.A. Classrooms – September 24, 2026

If you have any questions pertaining to the information in this communication, or require additional information, please contact Kim Kelstrom at 457-3907.

Cabinet Approval: 

Name and Title: Patrick Jensen, Chief Financial Officer



500 Capitol Mall

•
Suite 1700

•
Sacramento

•
California 95814

•
TEL: 916 . 446 . 7517

•
FAX: 916 . 446 . 2011

•
www.sscal.com

DATE: September 25, 2026

TO: Misty Her
Superintendent

AT: Fresno Unified School District

FROM: Your SSC Governmental Relations Team

RE: ***SSC's Sacramento Weekly Update***

Bill Signing Update

Governor Gavin Newsom has until the end of next Wednesday, September 30, 2026, to act on bills sent to him by the Legislature at the end of session. With less than a week remaining before the deadline, the Governor will have to pick up the pace, as hundreds of bills remain on his desk awaiting action.

While we are still waiting for the Governor to act on the rest of the bills, he signed a number of measures late last week that will have implications for local educational agencies (LEAs), including the following bills that we have been tracking throughout the legislative process:

- Assembly Bill (AB) 1381 (Muratsuchi, Statutes of 2026) expands requirements related to previous employment disclosures for applicants seeking certificated or classified positions and makes related changes to the Commission on Teacher Credentialing's authority regarding unprofessional conduct.
- AB 1721 (Muratsuchi, Statutes of 2026) requires the Education Commissioner, in consultation with the State Board of Education and specified interest holders, to develop recommendations regarding the development and approval processes for comprehensive school safety plans.
- AB 2008 (Patel, Statutes of 2026) requires the California Department of Education (CDE), by October 1, 2027, to create a standardized template for LEAs to use when completing programmatic or expenditure reports for competitive state grant programs.
- AB 2225 (Patel, Statutes of 2026) requires the Education Commissioner to submit specified reports and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature regarding California's education governance structure, including opportunities to improve coordination, accountability, and efficiency among state entities.

- AB 2241 (Boerner, Statutes of 2026) requires the CDE to develop and post recommendations and best practices for the design of inclusive school playgrounds that provide students with disabilities opportunities to participate alongside their peers.
- AB 2460 (Celeste Rodriguez, Statutes of 2026) requires the CDE, by July 1, 2027, to review and, as necessary, update its model behavioral health referral protocols to include guidance for providing mental health supports in response to immigration enforcement activities or deportations affecting students or their families. By July 1, 2028, LEAs serving students in grades 7-12 must review and, as necessary, update their local behavioral health referral policies to address these circumstances.

Unless a later implementation date is specified in the legislation, the above bills go into effect beginning January 1, 2027.

Governor Newsom also vetoed several significant education bills over the last week, including the following that we have been tracking throughout the legislative process:

- AB 917 (Ávila Farías, D-Martinez) would have modified permanent-status requirements for certificated employees of school districts and county offices of education with fewer than 250 pupils in average daily attendance. The bill also would have allowed service as an instructor in certain regional occupational centers or programs to count toward permanent status in a school district.
 - The Governor's veto message raises concerns with creating different permanent-status requirements based on the size of an LEA and notes that changes to probationary periods and permanent employment status should be considered more comprehensively.
- AB 2142 (Garcia, D-Rancho Cucamonga) would have modified requirements governing school and community college district use of short-term classified employees, including establishing circumstances under which an employee would be presumed to be part of the classified service rather than a short-term employee.
 - The Governor's veto message raises concerns about the bill's effect on school and community college districts' ability to meet temporary staffing needs and the additional operational and fiscal pressures the measure could create.

With the September 30 deadline quickly approaching, the Governor will have to act on a significant number of remaining education bills over the coming days. We will provide a final legislative update next week highlighting the Governor's actions on significant education measures and what they mean for LEAs.

Leilani Aguinaldo

California Revenues Remain Above Forecast

By Wendi McCaskill, EdD, and Michelle McKay Underwood
School Services of California's *Fiscal Report*
September 23, 2026

The Department of Finance (DOF) released its September *Finance Bulletin* (Bulletin), yesterday September 22, 2026, updating economic conditions and California General Fund revenues through August. U.S. headline inflation remained at 3.4% in August, unchanged from July but one-half percentage point above its August 2025 level. Core inflation (which excludes food and energy) continued to moderate, declining from 2.5% in July to 2.4% in August. Energy prices remain a significant source of inflationary pressure. Gasoline prices were 27.4% higher than a year earlier, accelerating from 24.6% in July.

The September Bulletin reports August General Fund cash receipts of \$15.5 billion, \$1.5 billion, or 10.9%, above the 2026 Budget Act forecast for August. Personal income tax receipts were \$1.47 billion above forecast, while corporation tax receipts were \$56 million above forecast, and sales and use tax receipts were \$19 million above forecast. Looking more broadly, preliminary General Fund agency cash receipts since the April forecast are \$2.4 billion above projections. However, the DOF notes that \$828 million of the overage is attributable to cash collected during the 2025-26 fiscal year.

2026-27 Comparison of Actual and Forecast General Fund Revenues, August (Dollars in millions)

Revenue Source	Forecast	Actual	Difference	Percent Difference
Personal Income Tax	\$8,363	\$9,836	\$1,473	17.6%
Corporation Tax	\$305	\$362	\$56	18.5%
Sales and Use Tax	\$4,121	\$4,140	\$19	0.5%
"Big Three" Total	\$12,789	\$14,338	\$1,548	12.1%

Source: California DOF, September 2026 Bulletin

Note: Slight differences may occur due to rounding

Labor market conditions improved in August, although California's labor force continued to contract. The unemployment rate held steady at 5.1%, while the labor force declined by 50,500 people. Civilian employment declined by 36,500 people, while the number of unemployed declined by 14,000. Despite the contraction in the labor force, California added 39,400 nonfarm payroll jobs. Private education and health services led the gains, adding 18,600 jobs, followed by government with 9,800 jobs and leisure and hospitality with 7,800 jobs.

National labor market conditions improved in August. The U.S. unemployment rate held steady at 4.1% while the labor force increased by 683,000 people. The nation added 162,000 nonfarm payroll jobs. The largest gains were seen in leisure and hospitality, government, education and health services, and construction.

Housing indicators also showed improvement. California's median sales price for an existing single-family home increased 1.6% from July to \$901,420 and was 0.1% higher than a year earlier. Sales increased 2.4%

from July and were 1.4% higher than in August 2025. Through July, total housing permits were 16.5% above the same period in 2025, reflecting a 41.6% increase in multifamily permits, partially offset by a 0.8% decline in single-family permits.

Overall, the September Bulletin continues to present a mixed picture. General Fund revenues remain above forecast, and both California and the nation added jobs in August. At the same time, California's labor force continued to contract, and inflation remains elevated, with higher gasoline prices contributing significantly to the increase in headline inflation since February. Revenue performance over the coming months, especially during the more significant tax collection periods, will provide a clearer indication of the state's fiscal position as the 2027-28 Governor's Budget approaches.

Note: About 24% of California's youngest students were chronically absent in 2024-25, higher than the 19% chronic absenteeism rate for all students.

Many of California's Youngest Students Keep Missing Weeks of School, Data Show

By Betty Márquez Rosales
EdSource
September 24, 2026

When kids start attending school, the youngest tend to get sick their first year. Some may have a tough time adjusting to a new school routine. Some parents may believe missing the day's lesson isn't that big of a deal, so their student stays home.

But when young students miss school, the days absent can quickly add up and impact student learning. About 24% of California's youngest students were chronically absent in 2024-25, higher than the 19% chronic absenteeism rate for all students.

In October, the state will release data on chronic absenteeism from the 2025-26 school year, the first school year transitional kindergarten, or TK, was widely available for all families. Education experts and administrators will be zeroing in on attendance rates among the very youngest.

Down from a Covid peak

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more days in one school year. The overall rate has improved since the percentage of students in that category hit a peak of 30% of all students in the 2021-22 school year in California.

But the rate has remained high among TK and kindergarten students. That matters, early education researchers say, because the effects of not attending school regularly in the earliest years can show up in lower academic achievement years later.

"If they are missing school, they are missing out on the building blocks, and it will impact them for the rest of their lives," said Jessica Hull, executive director of communication and community engagement at Roseville City School District near Sacramento.

In many ways, it makes sense that the youngest students have spotty attendance. They tend to get sick more often, so higher rates of absenteeism are largely expected, say school administrators. This can be especially true for students who did not attend preschool or other early learning programs prior to TK.

“When your child starts school, that’s usually a year of sickness,” said Kara Stern, director of education at SchoolStatus, an education technology company that works with 123 California school districts on chronic absenteeism.

Illnesses such as colds — sometimes even monthly, according to SchoolStatus data — are often part of the TK and kindergarten experience because “it’s a first exposure to all these other kids,” said Stern.

Long-lasting effects of missing school

Some families are unaware of the foundational learning that happens every day in TK and kindergarten classrooms, said Hull.

“It doesn’t feel like it’s a requirement to attend each day,” she said. And since the Covid pandemic, parents have had difficulty discerning when a child might be sick enough to keep home from school, she said.

“It’s hard to send a 4-year-old to school if they have a runny nose,” said Hull.

Recent research shows that students who are chronically absent in TK and kindergarten are about twice as likely to transfer to other school districts, and that kindergartners’ ability to read and do basic math can be predictive of academic achievement by third grade and beyond. Part of that may be that students and families build routines in TK and kindergarten — establishing a wake-up time, getting to school on time, socializing with classmates — which helps with attendance as students grow older.

‘Absences sneak up on families’

A student who is chronically absent, and attends a typical 180-day school year, has missed about 3.5 weeks of school.

In 2021-22 when schools began reopening after Covid-related closures, nearly 2 million of the state’s TK-12 students were chronically absent. California districts launched a yearslong campaign to get students back into the classroom.

One of them was Roseville City, a 12,000-student district in Placer County. The district mailed letters to families explaining the importance of attendance, created graphics detailing how quickly absences can add up, and called families whose children were often absent.

In communications with parents, the district said it’s fine to keep a sick child home, but they can send them to school “if they are a little under the weather.”

The messaging worked. In three years, the district’s overall chronic absence rate dropped from nearly 26% in 2021-22 to 10.5% in 2024-25 despite an increase in total enrollment, according to state data.

But the district’s TK and kindergarten students were still missing class at alarming rates — at its peak in 2022-23 their chronic absence rate was 11 percentage points higher than the rest of the district, state data shows.

Last year, Roseville City focused its attendance communications on TK and kindergarten. The letters to those families described what their children were learning each day in class and how those lessons were the building blocks to reading, math, writing and science.

On the district's website, staff has also listed the building blocks children learn in early grades: hand-eye coordination in TK turns to learning sight words in kindergarten, writing sentences in first grade and writing short paragraphs in second grade. This is all part of educating parents on the value of their youngest children being in class, Hull said.

District staff have learned that "absences sneak up on families," Hull said. Families are not keeping track of the number of days, so the schools need to point out the amount of time a student is missing. "That's on our part to reach out and explain," she said.

This school year, Roseville City's communication to families about absenteeism is more tailored to the individual student.

Hull said that a letter might say "it's been two months of the school year, and you've already missed five days. You're on track to be chronically absent. What can we do?" The most important part of that message, she said, is showing families the district is ready to help.

That early intervention is critical, said Stern of SchoolStatus, which works with Roseville City. Once students become chronically absent, her team has found that reengaging them becomes much more difficult, especially as they grow older.

"Our data suggests that reaching out in the window of three to five absences is a lot more effective in returning them to school and not needing further intervention than waiting until it's more set in stone," said Stern.

SchoolStatus' internal data for the 2025-26 school year seems promising. In 97 of the California districts they work with, the TK chronic absenteeism rate dropped to under 22% from nearly 29% in 2023-24. Among kindergartners, it dropped to about 20% from nearly 25% during the same two-year timeframe.

"It's a lot of extra work, but our entire system is so determined and focused on this because they do see that end result," said Hull of Roseville City. "They see the kids who return to school are doing better both academically and socially."

Note: The Trump Administration is proposing to require English-only instruction in Head Start programs, a change that would significantly affect California's dual-language learners and eliminate existing requirements supporting instruction, assessments, materials, and family communication in students' home languages.

How Trump's Plan to Make Head Start English-Only Would Hit L.A. Classrooms

By Kate Sequeira and Ava Hu
Los Angeles Times
September 24, 2026

Meiqian Kuang switches seamlessly between Mandarin and English as she teaches her transitional kindergarten students at Hillcrest Elementary in Monterey Park. Signs in English, Mandarin, Spanish and Vietnamese decorate the classroom, reflecting the most common languages students speak.

This dual-language class is also a federally funded Head Start program — long considered a gold standard in early childhood education — and must integrate learning with each child's cultural and linguistic upbringing.

But an overhaul of Head Start rules proposed by the Trump administration in August would fundamentally change that mission by mandating English-only classroom instruction. The proposed change would remove standards that require teachers or aides to speak the predominant home language of their students. Children's developmental screenings and assessments would not be required to be conducted in a family's language of choice. Essential materials for parents would no longer have to be translated.

Books, toys and curriculum materials in foreign languages would be purged from classrooms under the changes. The proposal suggests that school staff could use technology-based translation when they need to talk to families as communication avenues weaken.

The proposed changes for dual-language learners — which would hit Los Angeles County and California's diverse population hard — are part of the Trump administration's overhaul of Head Start. Plans also call for eliminating teacher-student staff ratios, defaulting caps to the licensing requirements of each state. It also seeks to remove current standards for developmental and health screenings and reduce the role of parents in Head Start operations.

The Trump administration says these changes will bring more flexibility to providers to better respond to the needs of their communities. The English-only mandate would align Head Start with President Trump's executive order declaring English as the official language of the United States. Prioritizing English "opens doors economically," the proposal reads.

"Head Start is designed to prepare young children to be ready to enter school, and providing a firm foundation in the English language is a critical part of that preparation," a spokesperson from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said in a statement.

The English-language requirement would apply to instruction.

Critics of the overhaul say the new policies will alter the mission of the anti-poverty, early learning program to provide high-quality services that prepare young children for school. Health, nutrition and family engagement have long been core values and some fear that without guardrails the program will falter.

The English-only rule, in particular, will make it harder for English learners to acquire the language and feel comfortable in their classroom. Some are concerned that children's multilingual skills could also weaken — along with communication with families.

“All that will be left is the carcass of Head Start,” said Khari Garvin, the former national director of the Office of Head Start during the Biden administration. “Developmental outcomes for children and families will absolutely wane.”

The proposal, which exempts tribal Head Starts furthering tribal languages, is currently undergoing public comment through Oct. 6. Roughly 800 comments address the English-only rule so far, largely showing strong opposition and calling it “detrimental” and a “barrier” for children learning English. A smaller number of comments applauded the administration's plan saying that it would “strengthen kindergarten readiness.”

Advocates expect the language requirement to be challenged in court if it remains unchanged when the rules are finalized.

And the change would come as Head Starts across the county saw a 4-point increase in the proportion of dual-language learners enrolled since 2022, nearly 290,000 children, according to [2025 data](#).

California receives \$1.5 billion annually in federal Head Start funding, serving 84,000 children across the state of which nearly two-thirds are dual-language learners. The state's biggest grantee, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, which funds the Hillcrest Elementary program, expects the mandate will affect roughly 40% of students enrolled in their partner classrooms who identify with a home language that is not English. More than three-quarters of all Head Start students in the county programs identify as dual-language learners.

“We should be implementing practices and approaches that support child outcomes,” said Luis Bautista, executive director of L.A. County Office of Education's Head Start and Early Learning Division. “An English-only approach would not be doing that. In fact, it would be hindering in many cases.”

California's English-only history

California restricted bilingual education in public schools nearly 30 years ago when voters passed Proposition 227. The 1998 proposition, which was repealed in 2016, shut down most of California's K-12 bilingual programs, dropping the number of students receiving bilingual instruction from 30% to 8% statewide.

The voter backlash to bilingual education reflected the sentiment of the time, said Lisa Garcia Bedolla, a professor of education at UC Berkeley. Prop. 227 followed a string of anti-immigrant actions, including a decision to make English the state's official language. In the midst of a massive migration into California, voters were worried the state's immigrant population was not assimilating adequately into U.S. culture, she said.

But as the retrenchment took hold, studies found that the English immersion approach did not improve academic outcomes. Since the law's voter-approved repeal, students receiving bilingual instruction have

demonstrated higher academic achievement across subjects and higher rates of English proficiency compared with students who received instruction in English only, Garcia Bedolla said.

“We learned and saw that actually multilingualism — biliteracy — is in fact a strength,” she said.

Revisiting English-only programming in Head Start may ultimately exacerbate those same problems, Garcia Bedolla said.

“In some ways, Head Start is going to be more impactful because that’s your introduction to what school is,” she said. “If school doesn’t feel good when you’re 3, it’s highly unlikely school is going to feel good when you’re 8 or 10 or 16.”

In the classroom

“Chester Raccoon stood at the edge of the forest and cried,” started Kuang as she sat at the front of the classroom last month, reading a book. Sixteen sets of eyes stared up at her from the rug as children strained to get a look at the tearful raccoon. She paused to translate to Mandarin before continuing to read Audrey Penn’s “The Kissing Hand.”

English and Mandarin proficiency was all over the map this early in the school year. In class, students learn half the day in Mandarin and the other half in English. They also learn Spanish culture and arts twice a week.

Early learning staff members for Garvey School District, a partner of the county Office of Education, speak English, Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese and Cantonese to accommodate the home languages of its community, including Monterey Park, a city that is nearly two-thirds Asian and just over a quarter Latino — and where 70% of residents speak a language other than English at home.

This single change banning language education to preschoolers would be a “moral crime,” said Supt. Anita Chu of Garvey School District, which includes Hillcrest Elementary.

Language support has been helpful for parents such as Yaya Huang, who is able to speak Mandarin with 4-year-old Xixi’s teachers about how she is doing.

Sidi Wang, another parent, said it’s helpful to communicate with office staff and teachers in Mandarin, even though she speaks English. She can glean more detailed information in Mandarin and feels more confident filling out school forms in her native language.

Both worry that restricting the program to English will also be a loss for their children, who they believe would benefit from the extra support for language acquisition.

Supporting a child’s home language

The benefit of supporting a child’s language extends further than academics. Wang said her daughter knew little English after spending a year in China with her grandparents. She had a difficult time making friends. And Wang estimates she could understand only a third of what her teacher said in the first day care she attended.

But switching to a bilingual Head Start program has given her daughter confidence and a newfound enthusiasm for school.

“The more comfortable they feel in their setting, the easier it is for them to integrate into school life, or in this case, Head Start life,” said Delia Pompa, a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute.

Studies show young brains have high plasticity that makes it easier for children to grasp new languages naturally. They are able to pick up sounds, grammar and pronunciation through immersion rather than formal lessons.

Because of that, experts say there is no detriment to English learning when a child is also exposed to another language. Instead, it can help children learn English faster, said Alexandra Figueras-Daniel, a bilingual early childhood education policy specialist at Rutgers University’s National Institute for Early Education Research.

Pre-reading skills, for example, are easier to develop in the language a child has been honing since birth. Those skills can transfer to English more easily once developed, Pompa said.

“You’ve got the native language as a scaffold for these young kids who are just beginning to acquire complex concepts, who are just beginning to understand the world around them,” Pompa said.