



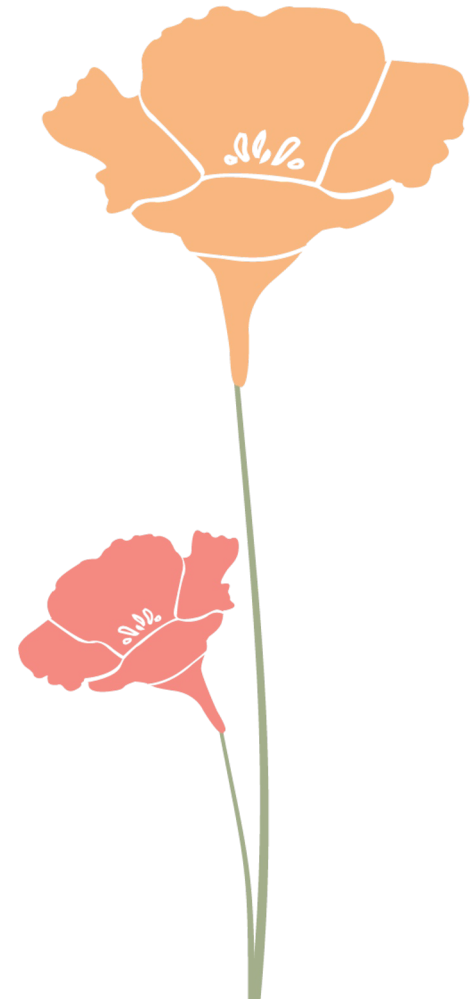
Inclusion in California  
Early Learning and Care

# Preschool Inclusion: Lessons Learned from One State

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Division for Early Childhood Conference

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# Who is in the room?

- State administrators
- Local administrators
- Practitioners
- Families
- TA providers
- Others?

# Study Overview

- Child Care Policy Research Partnership Grant
  - Collaboration between CCDF Lead Agencies and research entities
  - Focus on CCDF subsidized programs
- Intended to impact policy implementation related to CCDF programs
- CCDF Lead Agency in California
  - CDE through June 30, 2021
  - CDSS as of July 1, 2021
- Oct. 2019-March 2024





# Study Design

Method	Data Collection	Sample
Administrative Data	Subsidized early learning and care Special Education	All children ages 3-5 with disabilities
Key Informant Interviews	Interviews	23 professionals in a variety of roles in early childhood and early childhood special education
Case Study of California as a whole	Interviews	Families, child care directors, teachers, district administrators, R&R staff, family center staff, Regional Center staff
Statewide Survey	Surveys	Child Care Directors Local Special Education/ECSE Administrators



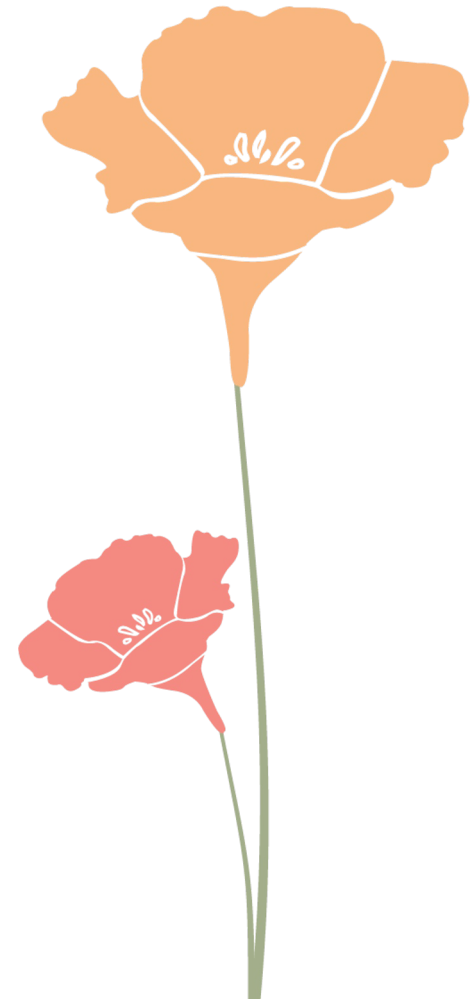
# Study Objectives

- Objectives
  - Describe the status of preschoolers with disabilities in subsidized early learning and care in California
  - Identify the **facilitators and barriers to the inclusion of preschoolers with disabilities** in subsidized early learning and care and strategies to increase facilitators and decrease barriers
  - And also (added later): Looking at the data with an equity lens



# Case Study Interviews

Role	Number Interviews
Child Care Director	13
District Early Childhood Special Education/Special Education Administrator	7
District Early Childhood Administrator	1
Family	6
Family Resource Centers/Parent Training and Information Center	3
Local Child Care Planning Council	1
Resource and Referral	10
Regional Center	2
Teacher	6





# Defining Inclusion

- Subsidized Care Database
  - Child attends a subsidized program/receives subsidy and has an IEP on file
- Special Education Database
  - Child with an IEP attends an early childhood program and receives the majority of their special education services in that classroom (Indicator 6a)





# Defining Inclusion: Gold Standard

- Child with an IEP is receiving special education services with same-aged peers without disabilities
- Child with an IEP has access to the general curriculum
- Child with an IEP receives their special education services in (not pulled out of) the classroom
- Proportion of children with IEPs in the classroom is similar to the proportion of children with disabilities in the general population
- Specialists support the teacher in working with the child to achieve their IEP goals
- Specialists include the child's peers in service delivery
- Child and family transitions during the day or week are minimized

# Context -National

- Administrative Data: Removal of 5-year-olds in Kindergarten from Indicator 6a beginning in 2019
  - First year was optional
  - Required beginning 2020
- COVID-19 Pandemic
  - Program closures
  - Personnel shortages in early learning and care
  - Delayed referrals and evaluations for preschool special education eligibility



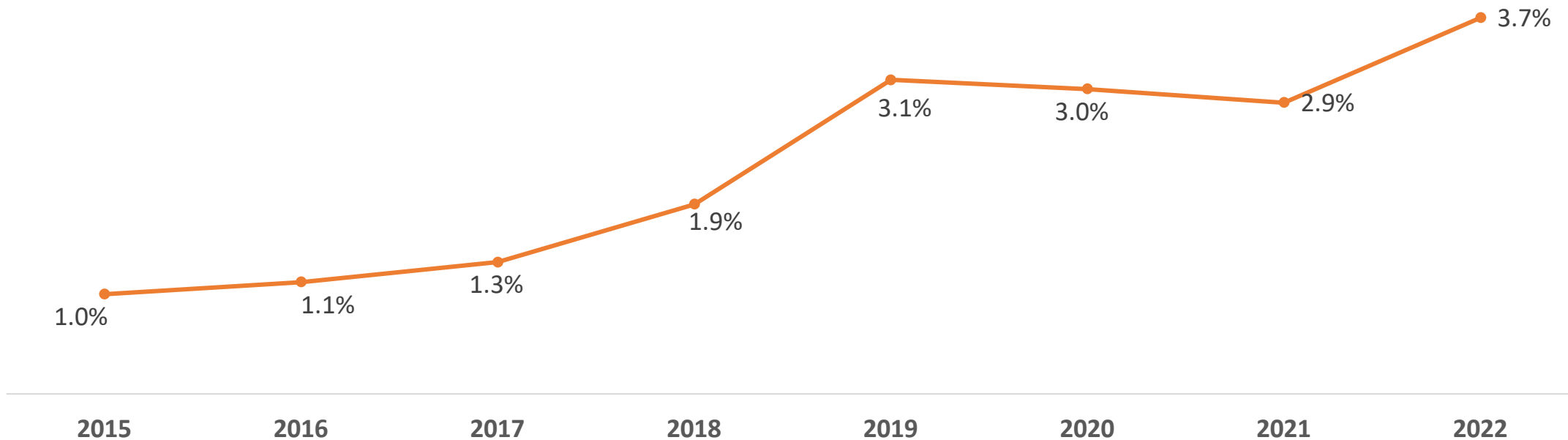
# Context - California

- Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program (IEEEP) funding to 64 districts/county offices of education, June 2020-Dec. 2024
  - Second round of IEEEP funding cancelled by legislature then reinstated
- Universal PreK through Transitional Kindergarten (TK) expansion and California State Preschool Program (CSPP)
  - Children in TK removed from the Indicator data
- Children with disabilities no longer required to be income eligible to enroll in CSPP
- CSPP 10% set aside for children with disabilities rolling out
  - 5% in 2022
  - Increase to 7.5% planned for 2023 has been put on hiatus for 2 years



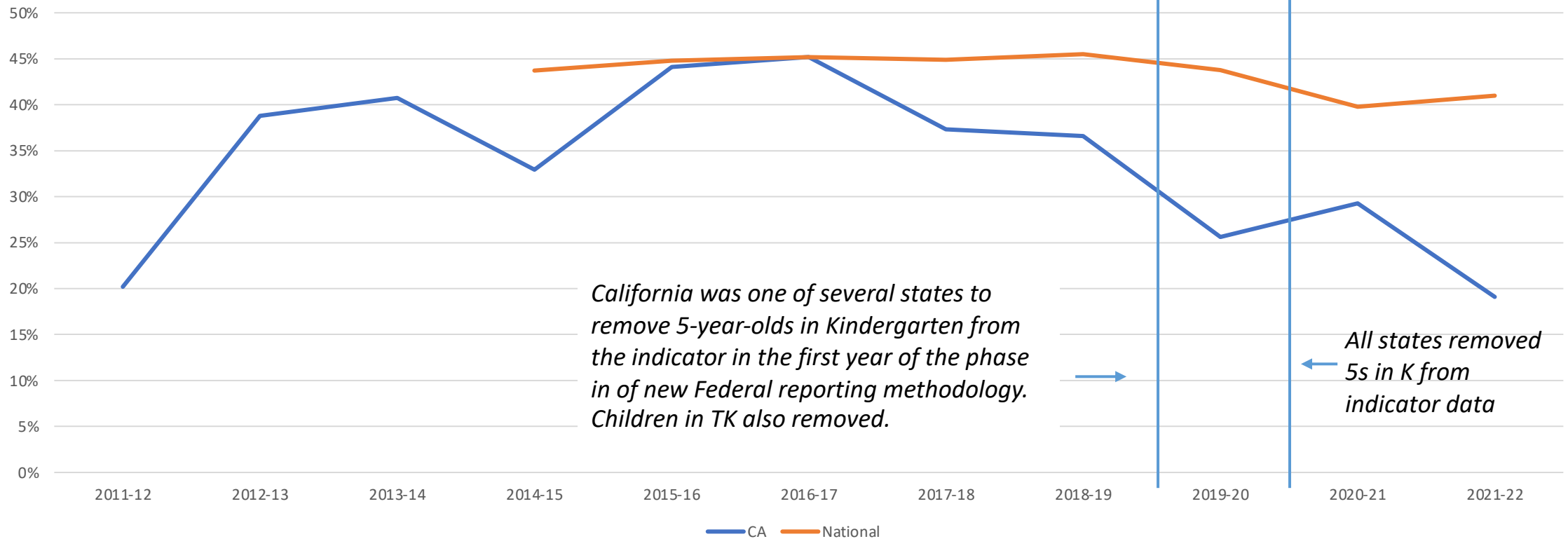
# The percentage of preschoolers who receive subsidized care and have an IEP has steadily increased.

Percentage of Preschoolers with Subsidy Who Have an IEP  
(CDMIS, October of Each Year)



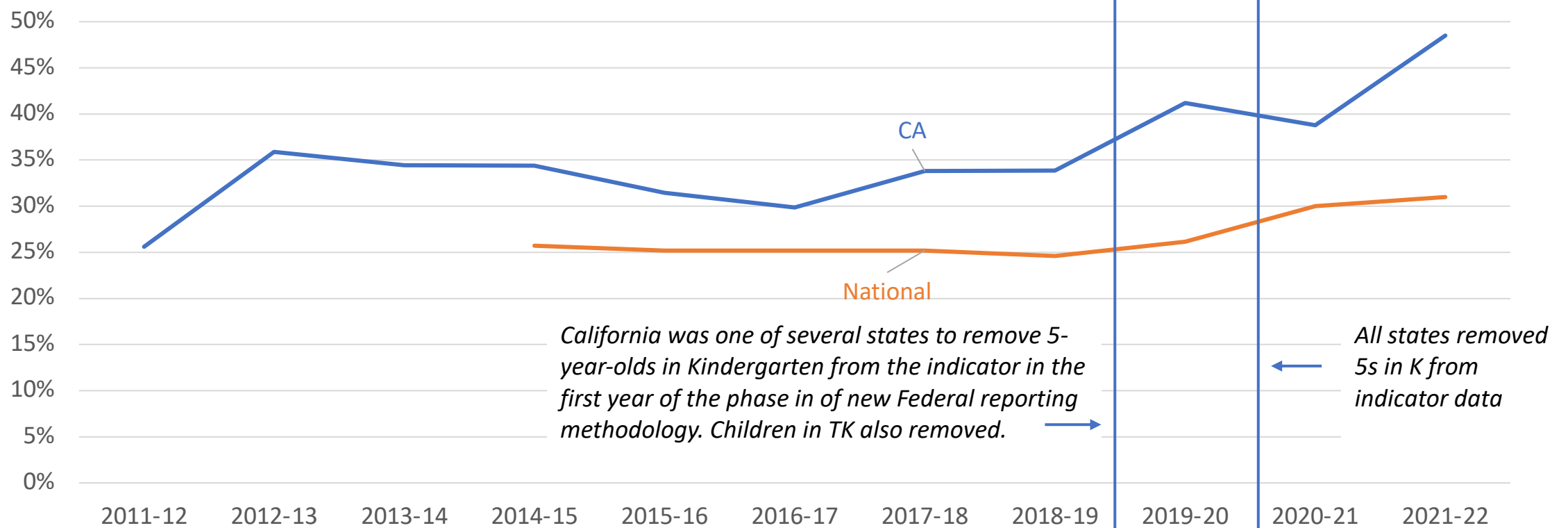
# California's inclusion rates have historically fallen below the national average and have declined in recent years.

Percentage of Preschoolers with Disabilities Who Attend an Early Childhood Program and Receive a Majority of Their Special Education and Related Services in that Location



# The percentage of preschoolers receiving their services in segregated settings in California has consistently exceeded the national average.

Percentage of children ages 3-5 receiving the majority of the special education services in segregated settings (Indicator 6b)

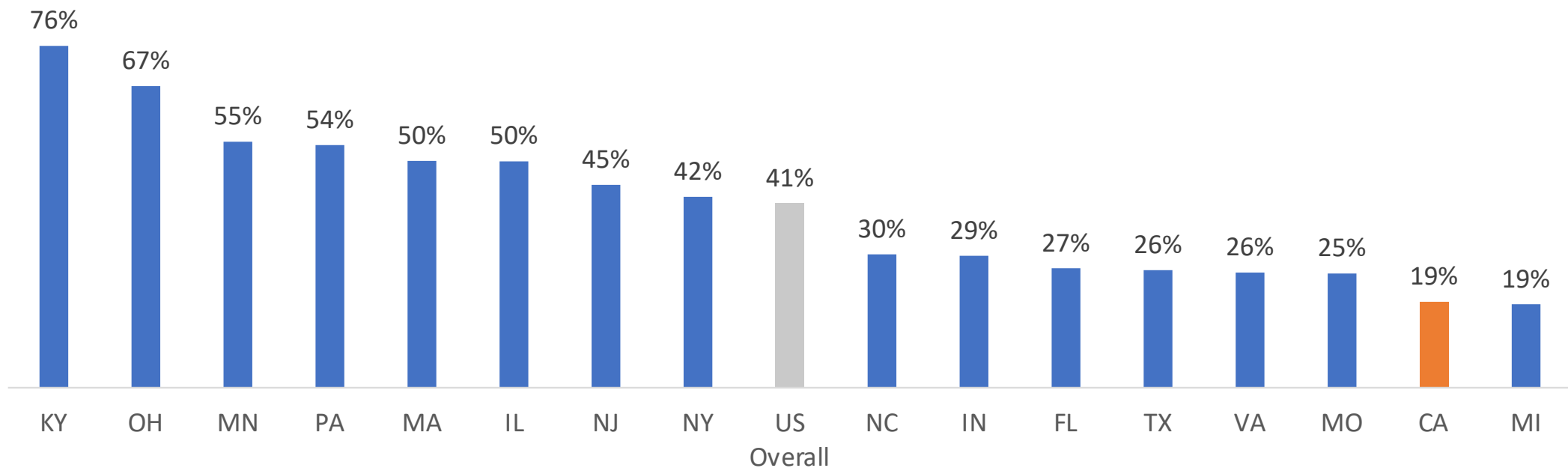




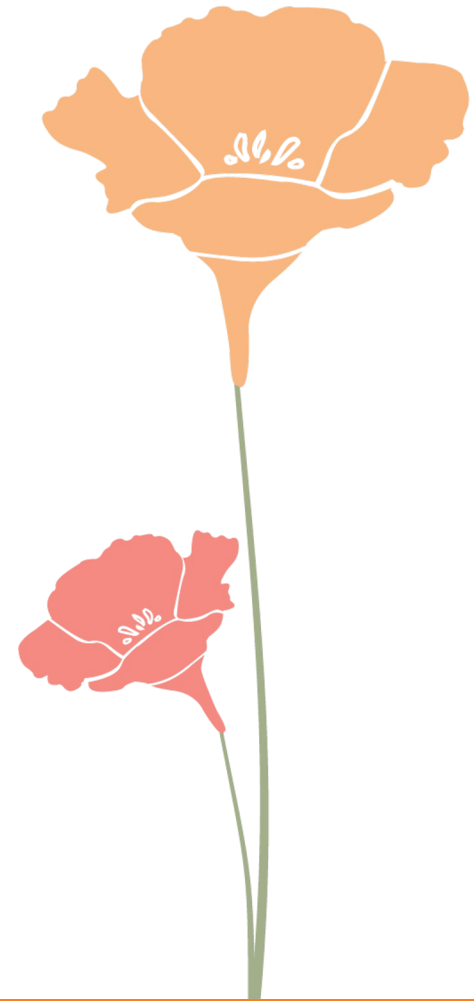
# Compared to other states, including those of similar size, California's preschool inclusion rate lags.

**Indicator 6A: Percentage of preschoolers with an IEP who receive the majority of special education services in a regular early childhood program (FY2021-22)**

States with at least 10K preschoolers with an IEP



# Barriers and Facilitators Identified



# Barriers to receiving special education services in a class with same aged peers – **District issues**

- Continues to be an over reliance on self-contained classrooms
- For general education placements, districts rely on classes they operate directly or through contract
  - There are not enough slots in these classes for all the children with IEPs who could benefit
  - Not all districts have CSPP
- Within districts, those programs are under early childhood
  - Special education and early childhood have to work together on how many slots (above the required percentage) should be for children with IEPs
  - Concerns about proportions of students with IEPs to same aged peers



## Some statewide numbers

- CSPP serves 93,000 preschoolers
- CA has 46,000 preschoolers receiving special education

**CSPP cannot be the primary source of general education placements.**

# Barriers to receiving special education services in a class with same aged peers – **More district issues**

- Districts have minimal connections with child care programs in the community
  - Do not see them as placement options
  - Even if child is already there, would not provide services there
- Various reasons cited
  - Not enough staff to send into community (“for one child”)
  - Cannot control what happens there, whether IEP is implemented
  - Union contract keeps district staff on district grounds
  - Some programs are not safe



# Facilitators to receiving special education services in a class with same aged peers – **District issues**

- Commitment to placing more children in general education classrooms
- Sense that things are getting better – but also that there is work to be done and it will take time.
- Recognition by district leaders that mindsets need to change
- TK will provide more opportunities as a gen ed setting for 4-year-olds





## Barriers to child achieving good outcomes in an inclusive setting – **District Issues**

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- Each district is figuring out how to use their EC programs to provide special education services and access to the general education curriculum
- Currently, not mechanisms for districts to get or exchange information on these structural issues
- Teachers in CSPP are not certified teachers
- Some TK classrooms are too academically oriented



# Facilitators to child achieving good outcomes in an inclusive setting – **District issues**

- CSPP teachers are being provided professional development around supporting children with disabilities
  - **BUT some/much of this is grant funded. Is it sustainable?**
- Recognition that CSPP and spec ed staff need time to communicate and plan together. Districts trying to do this
- Some TK classes are developmentally appropriate and are a good gen ed options for 4-year-olds

# Barriers to serving child with disability/IEP in a community child care program

- All the issues currently impacting child care
- Teachers are not trained in how to support children with disabilities
  - Some supports exist but varies across the state and across time
  - School districts have expertise but do not connect with child care centers





## Barriers to receiving special education services in a class with same aged peers – **Family issues**

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- What the districts provide (e.g., half day programs or even full school day programs) does not meet the family's need for child care
- Families who need more care than the district EC class offers have to make tradeoffs
- **Attending multiple programs is not optimal for learning and development**



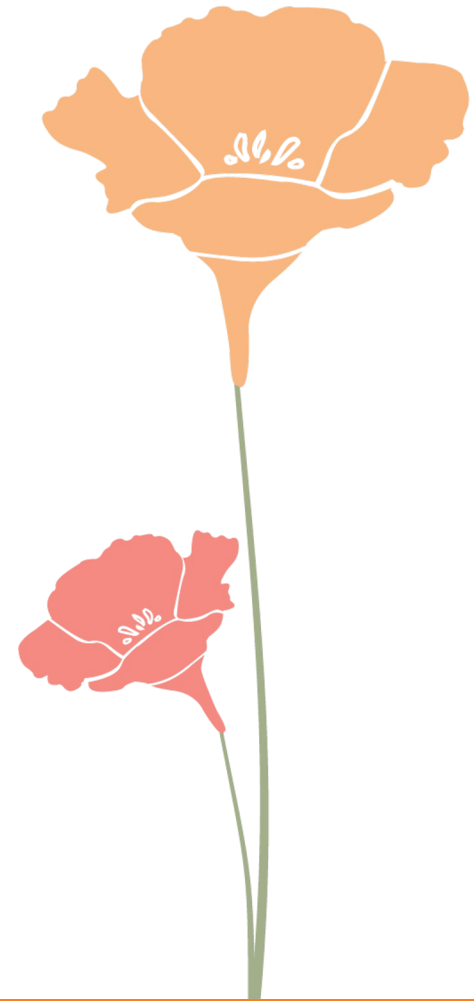




## Discussion

- How do the barriers and facilitators we identified align with your experiences?
- How have other states and school districts made inclusion (**including service delivery**) in community-based settings work?
- What else does this bring up for you?

All of this got us thinking...





# What does equity in access mean for children with disabilities?

- **Normalization principle:** People with disabilities should have lives that are as similar as possible as those without disabilities.
- For families accessing subsidized care this means their choices for child care should be the same as any other family in their community.
- If school districts are requiring families experience disruptions or transitions that other families do not because they have a child with a disability, is that equitable?



# Inclusion Challenges and Opportunities

- Early learning and care “system” in each community is made up several programs operated by and funded by different entities.
- Special education for 3-to-5-year-olds is provided by local school districts.
  - Only some school districts provide general preschool programs, and these tend not to be full day (7 am to 6 pm) or full year programs.
- Increasing collaboration and support between districts and other entities is needed for more equitable access to inclusion.
  - Includes districts providing ongoing support to community-based programs to build their capacity to serve children with disabilities well.



**To increase equitable access to high quality care and inclusion, community-based child care programs have to be a viable special education service location for school districts.**

**And this means addressing the barriers to why this isn't happening now.**

# Defining Inclusion: Revisiting the Gold Standard

Child with an IEP is receiving special education services with same-aged peers without disabilities

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Proportion of children with IEPs in the classroom is similar to the proportion of children with disabilities in the general population

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# How to move forward?

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Where do we go from here?







# Address Systemic and Structural Issues

- Address the system and structural issues for **increasing placement options** for preschoolers with disabilities, especially and including those whose families need child care
- Need structures to support school district personnel in how to **design systems that provide preschoolers with IEPs good learning environments in general ed classrooms**
  - Provide special education services in district EC programs
  - Collaborate with child care centers to expand EC options for children with disabilities



# Provide consistent supports

- Need structures to provide statewide consistently funded **professional development and other resources** to CSPP and all other EC programs, including community-based programs





## What about attitudes?

- Need more information
- No question some mindsets need to be changed
- Indications so far is that the barriers are far more structural than attitudinal





**Thoughts?  
Questions?  
Reflections?**



# Thank you

This project is made possible by Grant No. 90YE0218 from the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation ([OPRE](#)) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of these institutes. We are committed to providing access to our web pages for individuals with disabilities. If for any reason you are having difficulty accessing any of our resources, please [contact us](#).



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