

# CALIFORNIA EARLY WEALTH ACCOUNTS SYSTEM PLAN

Updated October 2025



The  
**BlackRock**  
Foundation

CALIFORNIA CHILD SAVINGS  
ACCOUNT COALITION



**UCLA** CalKIDS  
Institute





**FIONA MA, CPA**  
**TREASURER**  
**STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

To Our Partners and Community Members,

It is with deep appreciation that I recognize the many dedicated individuals and organizations who contributed to the creation of the California Early Wealth Accounts System (CEWAS) Plan.

This plan represents a powerful vision for how we can build a more equitable and prosperous future for all California children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Its strategies reflect not only thoughtful research and best practices in operating a system of early wealth-building accounts, but also the lived experiences and insights of families, educators, advocates, philanthropic leaders, and public servants across our state.

I want to thank the stakeholders who shared their time, expertise, and voices to help craft this Plan—including the California Child Savings Account Coalition, the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA, GRACE: End Child Poverty California and EPIC: End Poverty in California, as well as philanthropic supporters like The BlackRock Foundation.

A special thank you goes to our trailblazing partners—California's 15 locally operated child savings account programs—whose experience and deep community roots inspire and inform our state-led early wealth-building initiatives: CalKIDS and HOPE Children Trust Accounts. These pioneers are setting a statewide example of what's possible when equity, innovation and collaboration drive our efforts to invest in the next generation.

The California Early Wealth Accounts System Plan is a call to action. By aligning our efforts, we can ensure that the tools of economic opportunity reach every corner of our state. I look forward to continuing this journey with all of you, working together to grow assets, build hope, and invest early in our incredible young people.

In Peace & Friendship,

**FIONA MA, CPA**  
**California State Treasurer**

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When we invest in children today, we plant the seeds of a brighter future — strengthening families, communities and the economy for years to come. For more than a decade in California, local communities and more recently the state government have created early wealth-building accounts for our children providing a meaningful investment in their futures.

“Early wealth-building accounts” is an umbrella term encompassing Child Savings Accounts (CSAs), Child Development Accounts, Child Trust Accounts and Baby Bonds. These financial tools are designed to help young people — especially those from low-income families — build savings for post-secondary education, entrepreneurship, homeownership and other long-term wealth-building opportunities. Beyond the monetary assets, early wealth-building accounts help cultivate a college-going identity and instill a sense of hope and possibility for the future.<sup>1</sup>

California is a leader in early wealth-building. The state hosts 15 locally-operated CSA programs, CalKIDS — currently the nation’s largest CSA state-run program — and the forthcoming HOPE Children Trust Account program. These critical financial investments support children’s educational success and long-term financial security, with a focus on building expectations and expanding access for those furthest from opportunity.

In July, 2025 federal law (Public Law No: 119-21) created a new tax-advantaged individual retirement account (IRA) called a Trump Account, for individuals under 18 years old. It also authorized a one-time federal government deposit of \$1,000 into a Trump Account for children born in 2025–2028. Key design decisions — how these accounts are structured, promoted and accessed — will determine who benefits. Our priority is to ensure that low-income families claim these funds for their babies.

**As of September 2025, 5.5 million California children — most from disadvantaged backgrounds — now have \$2.3 billion invested in their futures through CalKIDS and local CSA Programs. Another \$100 million is earmarked for young people eligible for HOPE accounts.**

**The California Early Wealth Accounts System (CEWAS) Plan seeks to align public, nonprofit and philanthropic leaders around a set of strategies to expand awareness, access and engagement in CalKIDS, local CSA programs and HOPE accounts. This will ensure that young Californians, especially those furthest from opportunity, fully benefit from all available wealth-building opportunities.**

<sup>1</sup> Elliott, W. (2024, Jan.). Assessing the evidence for Children’s Savings Accounts (CSAs) as an effective strategy for improving children’s postsecondary outcomes: The continuum of evidence of effectiveness. University of Michigan. Center on Assets, Education and Inclusion (AEDI).

## IMPACT

Over the next three years, the California Early Wealth Accounts System Plan aims to:

- **Grow meaningful financial assets for every child** by building a coordinated system that supports wealth accumulation from birth through young adulthood.
- **Embed our early wealth-building programs into the fabric of family and community life**, making them trusted, accessible and widely used.
- **Drive a 15% annual increase in claiming and engagement** across CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs.
- **Narrow the college enrollment gap by 10%** for underrepresented students by boosting access to savings and opportunity.

## EARLY WEALTH-BUILDING ACCOUNTS IN CALIFORNIA (SEPTEMBER 2025)

### Overall

CalKIDS 5.49M kids = \$2.32B for college

Local 200k kids = \$30M for college

### Funds withdrawn for post-secondary education

CalKIDS 124.5k kids = \$67.2M for college

Local CSA programs\* 5,300 high school graduates = \$3M for college

\* SFK2C and Oakland Promise

## ALIGNING CALIFORNIA'S EARLY WEALTH ACCOUNTS SYSTEM

The national early wealth-building field has grown organically over the last twenty years, driven by local leaders, philanthropies, researchers and policymakers seeking ways to propel the educational and economic success of low-income children. In California, beginning in 2011 this resulted in the emergence of more than a dozen locally built and operated Child Savings Account (CSA) programs, and the adoption of legislation authorizing the CalKIDS program in 2019 and the HOPE Child Trust Account program in 2022. Both CalKIDS and HOPE are administered by the California State Treasurer's Office.

While each early-wealth building program in California has emerged independently with distinct requirements, programming, infrastructure and leadership — collectively they can provide a powerful foundation of opportunity for our most vulnerable children. Aligning these programs and realizing their full potential is the goal of the California Early Wealth Accounts System (CEWAS) Plan.

The CEWAS Plan was developed by public and nonprofit leaders from CalKIDS, local CSA programs and HOPE, guided by the wisdom of participating youth and families. *The Plan assumes that annual state appropriations to fund new CalKIDS and HOPE accounts will be sustained, and that increasing awareness and engagement are the critical next steps.* Many of the strategies outlined in the CEWAS Plan can be implemented with existing resources. However, the Plan calls for approximately \$70 million in key new investments — \$40 million coming from the public sector and \$30 million from philanthropy.

**The CEWAS Plan is structured around six core pillars of an effective early wealth-building system:**

- |                       |                 |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 01   Partnerships     | 04   Data       |
| 02   Communication    | 05   Technology |
| 03   Account Balances | 06   Funding    |

For each of these system pillars, we have articulated a clear goal and set of priority strategies to achieve the goal. In the first section of the plan, you can click on the "learn more" button, under each strategy, to go directly to an implementation guide for that specific strategy. These guides offer details about the current context, why this work is important and the steps and resources required for implementation.

## CALKIDS

When CalkIDS launched in 2022 with an initial cohort of 3 million children, it single-handedly tripled the size of the CSA field nationally. The program provides:

- **A \$100 seed deposit** for every newborn in California
- **A \$500 deposit** for all low-income and English learner public school students
- **Additional deposits** into the accounts of children in foster care (\$500) and those who are homeless (\$500)

Enrollment is automatic, but families are encouraged to activate their accounts online and open linked 529 savings plans. Funds are designated for post-secondary education expenses. The State Treasurer's Office leads CalkIDS.

## LOCAL CSA PROGRAMS

California is home to 15 local CSA programs (see page 57), located in eleven communities throughout the state. Operated by a mix of nonprofits, local governments, school districts and a credit union, these programs are diverse in their design but similar in their high degree of engagement with the families and focus on post-secondary education. Most of California's local CSA programs offer initial seed deposits and additional deposits to celebrate when children complete activities or reach certain milestones.

## HOPE CHILDREN TRUST ACCOUNT PROGRAM

Launching in early 2026, the HOPE Children Trust Account program will establish early wealth-building accounts for:

- Low-income children who lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19
- Children in foster care for over 18 months

The program aims to serve 8,000 children and youth in its pilot year, and will expand to include an estimated 58,000 eligible young people soon after. The HOPE legislation envisions eventually providing this opportunity to all low-income children in the state. Upon turning 18, participants will receive an estimated \$3,000 for post-secondary education, entrepreneurship, home ownership, savings and other long term asset-building investments. A financial education component will be offered. To date, California has allocated \$100 million toward this initiative with plans to add \$15 million annually. The State Treasurer's Office leads HOPE.



# PARTNERSHIPS

**GOAL** Partner with public agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) to increase awareness of and engagement with early wealth-building accounts.



**California's early wealth-building programs can only achieve their full impact if families are aware of them, understand their benefits and actively engage with them.** Local CSA program leaders have found that building trust and engagement often requires direct, personal outreach. Yet as the nation's most populous state, California faces a uniquely large challenge in reaching eligible families. Effective outreach therefore requires a multi-faceted approach that leverages trusted partners — public agencies and CBOs — who are already interacting with families and equipped to provide hands-on support.

The strategies in this section build upon lessons from CalkIDS' previous round of funding for local CSA partnerships as well as programs' current partnerships with state and local public agencies. We recommend expanding this work, while arming partners with data and communication tools and investing in building their capacity. Partnership strategies must be tailored to reach families at every stage, from newborns and young children to school-aged students and those in post-secondary education. Special attention should be given to reaching populations that face the greatest barriers to opportunity, including low-income students, homeless youth and children in foster care.

## STRATEGIES

**1 Establish an Outreach and Engagement Grants Program** to fund CBOs and local CSA programs for outreach, claiming support and engagement with capacity to work closely with the hardest to reach children — including those who are homeless, in foster care, COVID-bereaved, native and immigrants. [Learn more](#)

**2 Develop Early Wealth-Building Accounts Communities of Practice** to support CBOs, local CSAs and state agencies in cross-promoting CalkIDS, local CSA programs and HOPE. [Learn more](#)

**3 Support advocacy organizations** to secure State budget enhancements and regulatory and/or legislative changes needed to implement the CEWAS Plan. [Learn more](#)

**4 Strengthen partnerships with Public TK–12 Education** to engage school-aged children in the TK–12 public and charter school systems statewide.

[Learn more](#)

**5 Strengthen partnerships with Public Post-secondary Education** to engage students in the University of California, California State University and California Community College systems.

[Learn more](#)

**6 Initiate or expand partnerships with state and local public agencies** serving children, youth and families.

- **Low-income families** accessing the resources of the Department of Social Services, Department of Public Health and Beyond Covered California.

- **Newborns and young children** receiving services through county First 5 commissions and birthing and pediatric hospitals.

- **Children who are in foster care, homeless and COVID-bereaved** served by County Departments of Social Services and public schools.

[Learn more](#)

**7 Utilize the CalkIDS Institute at UCLA** as a research partner, helping build the evidence base, surface best practices and pilot new initiatives. [Learn more](#)

**8 Build a system of financial education services** for HOPE participants.

*Above: Excite Credit Union with Sammy at the Alum Rock spelling bee.*

*Right: San Francisco K2C Graduate Thailayah at Anniversary Celebration.*

## COMMUNICATIONS

**GOAL** Document and share best practices for engaging families with their early wealth-building accounts and align messaging across programs and partner organizations.

**California's early wealth-building accounts field has deep knowledge about communicating with children and families.** Local CSA programs bring decades of experience, CalKIDS has tested messaging strategies and the HOPE program is guided by insights from expert community-based organizations and youth. The challenge now is to document and share these best practices while creating a framework for ongoing learning and adaptation. Furthermore, additional communications resources should be created that tailor messaging using specific languages, images and platforms to reach different communities.



California's early wealth accounts system will be stronger if administrators and champions adopt shared language and a core messaging framework. Doing so will allow outreach efforts for one program to create greater understanding of other programs. While each program has unique features, aligning communication strategies will minimize confusion, enhance public understanding and boost participation.

### STRATEGIES

1

**Develop a marketing materials virtual clearinghouse** and dedicate funding for printing and dissemination to facilitate mass promotion by community-based organizations and public agencies. [Learn more](#)

2

**Create a robust Early Wealth-Building Accounts Communication Toolkit** and technical assistance that includes tailored resources for different audiences. [Learn more](#)

3

**Leverage the input of children, youth and families** to inform the content and delivery of early wealth-building account programs. [Learn more](#)

4

**Establish an Early Wealth-Building Accounts Train-the-Trainer Program** to certify community members and staff who support families in claiming and engaging with their accounts. [Learn more](#)

5

**Leverage state-mandated high school financial education** to inform students of CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA accounts. [Learn more](#)

6

**Mail annual statements** to CalKIDS families with information about the program and their account balances. [Learn more](#)

*Above: Presenter at Semillitas CSA outreach event in Santa Cruz, CA.*



## ACCOUNTS & BALANCES

**GOAL** Maximize the number of children with early wealth-building accounts and increase the funds available in those accounts.



**Every child can benefit from knowing they have money set aside for their future.** Having an early wealth-building account — funded through public and philanthropic investment and family contributions — can be transformative for children from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds. Access to financial education can help young adults make best use of these resources. While research has shown that even modest balances in these accounts are impactful, clearly larger sums make bigger investments possible.

Expanding accounts and balances requires ensuring that all eligible young people receive them and efficiently correcting enrollment errors when they occur. Encouraging community groups, businesses and philanthropic organizations to contribute to CalKIDS, local CSA or HOPE accounts can further increase account balances. Additionally, for families who are able to save, opening linked savings accounts and making deposits should be as simple and accessible as possible.

### STRATEGIES

- 1 **Design and implement a CalKIDS appeals process/correction procedure** for use when a child who should be eligible for CalKIDS does not have an account and align the California state budget allocation for CalKIDS seed funding to include all eligible children. [Learn more](#)
- 2 **Fully fund CalKIDS \$500 supplemental contributions** for students in grades 1–12 who are newly identified as in foster care. Identify eligible students on an annual basis per AB2508. [Learn more](#)
- 3 **Develop a Community Contributions Program** to encourage community groups — such as civic organizations, PTAs, businesses and religious groups — to raise money to add to the CalKIDS, local CSA and HOPE accounts of children in their community, thus growing balances and showing young people their communities believe in them. [Learn more](#)
- 4 **Develop a system for opening new CalKIDS accounts** to facilitate Community Contributions and local CSA program migration. [Learn more](#)
- 5 **Simplify the set-up of linked Scholarshare Accounts** to increase family savings. [Learn more](#)
- 6 **Enable cash deposits into CalKIDS, local CSA program and HOPE accounts** using financial technology solutions. [Learn more](#)
- 7 **Build and Maintain public investment in CalKIDS accounts and the HOPE Trust Fund** to ensure this opportunity for all eligible children and youth. [Learn more](#)

*Above: San Francisco K2C Deposit Day at Citibank.*

## GOAL

Leverage participant data to improve outreach and engagement.



**Automatically-created early wealth-building programs rely on external data sources to uniquely identify each child beneficiary of the accounts.** CalkIDS, for example, uses information from the California Department of Public Health and the California Department of Education, while most local CSA programs depend on County Vital Records Agencies or local school districts. However, challenges with these data sources can lead to errors in eligibility, missing accounts or incomplete contributions.

To effectively inform families about their accounts, assist them in claiming funds or facilitate disbursements, it is critical to have accurate participant data — especially for the most under-resourced children, youth and families, who may face additional barriers to engagement. Strengthening data-sharing processes, while maintaining strict privacy and security standards, will allow for more effective outreach and ensure that every eligible child can fully benefit from their early wealth-building accounts.

## STRATEGIES

1

**Improve the accuracy of Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)** student-level data collected by schools to ensure all eligible students receive CalkIDS accounts, as this data from the CDE is used for account creation. [Learn more](#)

2

**Publish aggregate CalkIDS data by school and district online**, including accounts created, claimed and disbursed disaggregated by student demographic. [Learn more](#)

3

**Partner with the California Cradle-to-Career Data System (C2C) and the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC)** to incorporate student-level data on CalkIDS and HOPE eligibility, claiming and disbursement in order to make this available to families and schools. [Learn more](#)

4

**Encourage local districts to use their own data** to identify eligible students for the purpose of targeted outreach and engagement until this student-level data can be shared by CalkIDS and HOPE. [Learn more](#)

*Above: The CalkIDS Institute participates in the Academic Advancement Program (AAP) Open House, introducing students to the program and assisting them in claiming their accounts.*



## TECHNOLOGY

**GOAL** Increase usage and engagement through improved web and mobile accessibility, simplified sign-on methods and streamlined portal design.



**California's early wealth-building programs operate through separate technology systems, creating barriers for families trying to access and manage their accounts.**

Many eligible families face challenges with complex registration processes, limited mobile access and fragmented login systems across CalKIDS and local CSA accounts. The addition of family-owned 529 Plans and future HOPE accounts further complicates the experience.

Modernizing these platforms with user-centered design principles can significantly improve account activation and engagement, particularly for underserved communities facing barriers related to technology access, language and digital literacy. Creating seamless, intuitive interfaces, especially on shared platforms, will enhance the immediate user experience and establish a strong foundation for California's early wealth-building programs to grow and evolve together in the future.

## STRATEGIES

1

**Enhance navigation and visibility across all early wealth-building programs** by adding a standardized module or footer with direct links to all programs across organizational websites and mobile platforms.

[Learn more](#)

2

**Develop a plan for achieving a single online access point** for viewing, tracking and requesting disbursements from all early wealth-building accounts.

[Learn more](#)

3

**Explore migrating local CSA accounts onto the CalKIDS platform** where local programs are interested in making this shift. [Learn more](#)

4

**Improve mobile responsiveness across all platforms**, ensuring CalKIDS and local CSA interfaces work seamlessly on smartphones and tablets, with simplified form factors and optimized data entry for mobile.

[Learn more](#)

5

**Optimize the text messaging platform** embedded in CalKIDS and some local CSA programs. [Learn more](#)

6

**Allow phone numbers to be used for sign in verification** after the early wealth-building account has been claimed. [Learn more](#)

*Above: CalKIDS Institute participates in the annual Freshmen Transfer Summer Program hosted by the Academic Advancement Program (AAP), designed to support underrepresented incoming students at UCLA.*



## IMPLEMENTATION & FUNDING

### GOAL

Secure and deploy new state and philanthropic resources to implement the California Early Wealth Accounts System Plan over a three-year period.



The goals and strategies presented in the CEWAS Plan offer a clear and necessary roadmap for ensuring that all California children — especially those furthest from opportunity — can fully benefit from all of the early wealth-building programs available to them. The Plan aligns public agencies, nonprofit organizations, philanthropic funders and community partners in a coordinated system designed to optimize these critical opportunities for our children.

### Strategy Execution and Leadership

The CEWAS Plan identifies lead organizations for each of its strategies, including the State Treasurer's Office, the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA, the California Child Savings Account Coalition, local CSA programs, community-based organizations and vendors. For each strategy, the Plan specifies:

- Required new public or philanthropic funding over a three-year period
- Opportunities to leverage existing resources
- Needed legislative or administrative changes
- Expected implementation timeline (year 1, 2, 3 or ongoing)

These details are embedded in the full strategy descriptions (see pages 18–54 and summarized on page 17).

### The Early Wealth Partnership

In September 2025 we established the Early Wealth Partnership under the fiscal sponsorship of Community Initiatives to lead implementation of the California Early Wealth Accounts System Plan. A small staff will develop new partnerships, raise funds, manage grants and track progress. The Early Wealth Partnership will work closely with CBOs, public agencies and other stakeholders to execute strategies for outreach and engagement, communications, building account balances, data and technology — building a unified, mission-driven ecosystem aligned around shared goals.

### Funding and Financial Management

Implementation will be funded through a blend of public and philanthropic support. The Plan assumes continued state funding for CalKIDS and HOPE, including approximately \$185 million annually for CalKIDS deposits and at least \$15 million per year for the HOPE Trust Fund, along with ongoing staffing within the State Treasurer's Office.

While many strategies can be implemented using existing resources, others require new investment. The Plan estimates a need for \$40 million in additional public funding and \$30 million in new philanthropic contributions over three years. Philanthropy will be especially important in supporting culturally responsive outreach, technical assistance and community partnerships. The public sector investment will support program improvements for CalKIDS and HOPE as well as new contributions to children's accounts.

### Advocacy and Policy Support

To ensure sustained funding and policy alignment, the Early Wealth Partnership will fund advocacy efforts that build relationships with policymakers, integrate early wealth-building into broader economic goals and advance legislation and budget priorities that align with the CEWAS Plan.

### Evaluation and Data-Driven Improvement

An external evaluator will lead a formative impact evaluation, focusing on early outcomes and identifying areas for refinement. This work will complement ongoing research by the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA and the Treasurer's Office, with an emphasis on tracking tangible impacts and elevating family voices. Continuous data-informed learning will guide system improvements.

### Long-Term Sustainability

The California Early Wealth Accounts System Plan's long-term success depends on sustained investment, strong cross-sector collaboration and aligned public policy. By building a robust, scalable system, the Plan aims to serve as a national model for early wealth-building initiatives that secure lasting financial stability and upward mobility for children.

# CALKIDS IN THE CURRICULUM

## Riverside Office of Education

**Since CalKIDS' launch in 2022, Riverside County has emerged as a state leader in helping families claim their children's CalKIDS accounts.** As of February 2025, approximately 20% of eligible CalKIDS accounts in Riverside County had been claimed — nearly double the statewide average of 11% and ahead of all other counties, including Monterey, the next highest at 17%.

### A Countywide Approach

A major driver of this success is the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE), which has seamlessly integrated CalKIDS into its broader Financial Literacy Initiative. Supporting 30 school districts and charter organizations with a combined enrollment of more than 400,000 students — over half of whom (58%) have CalKIDS accounts — RCOE has taken a countywide approach to ensure families are aware of and actively claiming these resources.

Launched in 2020, the Riverside County Financial Literacy Initiative aims to equip students with the tools to manage money wisely and build a more financially secure future. Its efforts include a comprehensive financial literacy curriculum, community workshops, partnerships with banks and credit unions and fundraising for students' savings accounts through the Bright Futures Fund. When CalKIDS became available, RCOE saw a clear opportunity to align it with their ongoing financial education work to maximize its impact.

Central to this alignment is a robust CalKIDS Digital Dashboard on the Financial Literacy Initiative's website. The dashboard gives families and educators easy access to CalKIDS program guides, promotional materials in English and Spanish, how-to instructions for claiming accounts and sample lesson plans that introduce students to CalKIDS and broader savings tools like the ScholarShare 529. Schools are encouraged to teach these lessons during College and Career Week in October and during National Financial Literacy Month in April. These classroom sessions help students and their families check eligibility, claim their accounts and better understand how these funds can be used for college or career training.

### Motivating with Metrics

RCOE has also leveraged data in powerful ways to support its strategy. In 2023, Riverside signed data-sharing agreements with the California Department of Education and ScholarShare Investment Board. The agreements enable the county's Assessment, Accountability & Continuous Improvement unit to track which students are eligible for CalKIDS and whether their accounts have been claimed. The resulting "CalKIDS Scorecards" show district- and school-level claim rates and are updated regularly on the Financial Literacy Initiative's homepage, with schools ranked by performance. This transparency helped spark healthy competition and a sense of shared accountability across the county.

In addition to the public-facing tools, RCOE works directly with district leaders by providing confidential student-level reports highlighting which students still have unclaimed accounts. These targeted updates help schools focus their outreach and offer personalized support where needed most.

### Celebrating Wins Along the Way

Celebration is also a key part of RCOE's approach. Lesson plans conclude with student recognition activities, like taking photos with oversized checks representing their CalKIDS funds. Schools that reach 100% claim rates are honored with banners and public celebrations. As of March 2025, 11 schools had exceeded 90% claims, and several reached 100% in April. With new students becoming eligible each year, schools are encouraged to meet this goal annually, and RCOE plans to recognize high performers every spring.

Through curriculum integration, data-driven strategy, community engagement and public celebration, RCOE has made CalKIDS a visible and accessible part of school life in Riverside County. Its efforts offer a clear model for other counties seeking to increase CalKIDS participation and ensure more students benefit from early investments in their future.

### Additional Resources

- [CalKIDS Impact Report: July 1, 2022 — June 30, 2024](#)
- [Riverside County Office of Education CalKIDS Dashboard](#)
- [Riverside County Office of Education Financial Literacy Brighter Future Fund Student Savings Accounts](#)
- [Riverside County Office of Education Financial Literacy Initiative](#)
- [Riverside County Office of Education Financial Literacy Workshops](#)
- [Riverside County Office of Education Superintendent's Initiatives](#)
- [State Treasurer's Office and CalKIDS Honor Riverside County Office of Education for Investing in Financial Literacy](#)

## CASE STUDY

# INVESTING EARLY, DELIVERING RESULTS

## San Francisco's K2C Model



**Launched in 2011, San Francisco's Kindergarten to College (K2C) program is the nation's first citywide universal CSA program.** Jointly created by then-Mayor Gavin Newsom and Treasurer José Cisneros, the program aims to instill college-going mindsets by automatically opening a savings account with a \$50 seed deposit for every student in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD).

K2C has emerged as a national model for early wealth-building programs, combining automatic enrollment with high-touch engagement. Its impressive scale, innovative engagement strategies and research findings all offer valuable insights for the early wealth-building accounts field.

### Universal, Automatic Design Reaches Entire Communities

Today, K2C serves more than 54,000 students across all SFUSD schools. The program has facilitated over \$17 million in total savings for students and families. Students who have had their accounts since kindergarten and have contributed savings now hold an average balance of \$1,422 — an amount 28 times greater than the city's initial \$50 deposit. This level of savings demonstrates the program's power not just to start a financial journey, but to support substantial accumulation over time.

### Seed Money is Just the Start

K2C's success is rooted in its high-touch, community-embedded model. The program goes far beyond simply opening accounts by carrying out ongoing outreach and creative engagement strategies designed to foster trust and participation:

- **Deposit days** allow students to add money to their accounts at schools or during special events at City Hall.
- **Annual art and video contests** encourage students to imagine their futures and reinforce college-bound identity.
- **Multilingual and multi-platform communications** — including flyers, school events and mass texting — ensure that families from diverse backgrounds receive timely, accessible information about how to engage with their children's accounts.
- **Strategic partnerships** with schools and community groups embed K2C into trusted local networks.

### K2C's First Kindergarten Class Heads to College

K2C reached a major milestone in 2023: the first class of K2C participants graduated from high school. More than 2,800 students from the graduating classes of 2023 and 2024 have already used a combined \$1.4 million from their K2C accounts to help pay for college or vocational training. These graduates are starting college not only with financial resources, but with a foundation of support that began in kindergarten.

### The Results are in: K2C Drives Student success

Preliminary findings from an ongoing evaluation revealed exciting results: K2C has significantly boosted underrepresented students' likelihood of graduating from high school on time and enrolling in post-secondary education. K2C students in the class of 2023 who had accounts since kindergarten were 6 percentage points more likely to enroll in education after high school compared to peers from the class of 2022. This effect was largely driven by gains among students of color who are underrepresented in higher education. Underrepresented students had a 12 percentage point increase in college enrollment and a 7 percentage point increase in on-time high school graduation. These effects may even improve over time, as the initial evaluation only captures immediate college enrollment (the September immediately after graduation).

San Francisco's K2C program shows what's possible when local champions, inclusive program design and trusted community partners come together to build generational opportunity.

### Additional Resources

- [San Francisco K2C website](#)
- [San Francisco K2C: September 2024 Research Findings](#)
- [Kindergarten to College \(K2C\) College Enrollment Findings: Fuel for an Evidence-Based Movement](#)

*Above: San Francisco K2C Deposit Day at Citibank.*

# SEEDS OF CHANGE

## Lessons from Semillitas



**Launched in 2019 and fully implemented in 2021, Semillitas — Spanish for “little seeds” — is a CSA program deeply rooted in its Santa Cruz County community.** The program automatically enrolls every newborn in the county and starts each child off with a \$50 deposit. As children grow, their accounts grow with them: Semillitas adds to accounts when families attend wellness checkups, dental visits and positive parenting workshops. Account balances can reach up to \$500 by the time children turn five. Reaching families in communities often underserved by traditional financial systems and government services, Semillitas is redefining what it means to build early wealth — starting not just with dollars, but with relationships.

### **Rooted in Community, Growing Through Trust**

Semillitas is grounded in an understanding that families in the Santa Cruz County community face barriers that go beyond finances. More than 60% of Semillitas families are low-income, roughly half speak only Spanish or an indigenous language, and many do not have the digital literacy needed to navigate online claiming processes. These hurdles all shape how and whether families participate in programs like Semillitas, CalKIDS and HOPE. Semillitas responds with practical solutions: multilingual outreach, hands-on claiming support and help setting up email addresses.

Building trust is a cornerstone of Semillitas’ work. Many families in the program are new immigrants or unfamiliar with formal savings accounts. Some assume the offer is “too good to be true,” while others hesitate to share personal information. In this context, trust must be earned one conversation at a time. That’s why Semillitas invests in high-touch, multilingual engagement through regular in-person connections. These touchpoints go beyond logistics; they create space for dialogue, reassurance and long-term connection. For example, Semillitas periodically hosts café y pan sessions, where families are invited to stop by their office and chat over coffee and bread.

### **Embedded in an Ecosystem of Support**

Another way Semillitas stands out is in the many ways the program has embedded itself into the organizations already working with local families with young children. Examples include:

- **Hospital outreach with First 5 Santa Cruz County:** Semillitas partners with its local First 5 County Commission, which meets families in the hospital when children are born to share information. This partnership provides Semillitas with contact information for families of newborns, allowing them to follow up with asset-building messages.
- **Outreach through *promotoras*:** Semillitas’ sister program at Ventures, Futuro, includes a worker cooperative of *promotoras*. These trusted community educators have been trained on Semillitas and CalKIDS and weave early wealth-building messages into their outreach activities. In just three months, they’ve called over 5,000 families, welcoming them into Semillitas and CalKIDS, building trust and ensuring they know where to turn for answers and support.
- **Milestone contributions via health partnerships:** Semillitas’ model of making additional deposits when families reach milestones such as pediatric wellness visits and dental visits is made possible through funding from Federally Qualified Health Centers.
- **Medi-Cal contributions:** Central California Alliance for Health, the region’s Medi-Cal provider, makes additional deposits into Semillitas accounts.
- **Embedded in public health planning:** Semillitas successfully advocated for its programming to be included in Santa Cruz County’s Community Health Improvement Plan as an economic security initiative. This recognition not only affirms Semillitas’ role in advancing community well-being but also deepens its strategic partnership with the County — one of its largest funders — and facilitates automatic enrollment of babies through access to county data systems.

*Above: Andrea and her baby, Julieta, who has a Semillitas account with an initial deposit and milestone contributions.*

- **Innovative data sharing and partnership:** Santa Cruz County is unusual in that babies receive Statewide Student Identifiers (SSIDs) at birth, instead of upon school enrollment. This innovation, made possible by a data-sharing agreement and partnership with the Santa Cruz County Office of Education and First 5, allows Semillitas to follow children in its program to any school they attend in the state. Santa Cruz County Office of Education is also a funder of Semillitas and partners with the program to do outreach events, reaching hundreds of families.

Communities across California and throughout the nation are seeking ways to close persistent wealth and health gaps. Semillitas offers a compelling model for how to engage families holistically, build trust and amplify impact through partnerships.

#### **Additional Resources**

- [Semillitas' website](#)
- [Semillitas 2024 Annual Report](#)

# BUILDING CONNECTION THROUGH COLLABORATION

## California Department of Social Services Outreach Campaign

### The CalKIDS program assesses potential outreach partnerships through four guiding principles:

- **Impact:** Collaborative efforts support shared goals across programs.
- **Credibility:** Trusted messengers improve families' confidence in taking action.
- **Advocacy:** Endorsements from organizations known to families carry greater weight than more generalized self-promotion.
- **Reach:** Community partners already have trusted access to key audiences.

In spring 2025, CalKIDS established a partnership with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to pilot an email and text campaign designed to increase CalKIDS awareness and engagement among families receiving CalWORKS (California's cash assistance program) and CalFresh (the state's food program).

Using the CDSS's existing communications channels to families, they launched a multi-lingual email and text outreach campaign.

The implementation included:

- Concise, action-oriented messages co-developed with CalWORKS staff.
- Messaging in families' preferred languages (English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Armenian, Arabic, Farsi, Mandarin, Russian, or Ukrainian), linking directly to the CalKIDS website.
- Web-based tracking of site traffic and engagement from the campaign.

The campaign sent over 3.2 million notifications targeting CalWORKS and CalFresh program recipients with children. The emails began: "As part of our ongoing commitment to provide the families we serve with access to essential resources and opportunities, CDSS is excited to share with you another program from the state of California — the CalKIDS program." The email went on to provide basic information about the CalKIDS program and how to check eligibility. The text messages said simply: "CDSS-CalKIDS: Your child(ren) may be eligible for a CalKIDS Scholarship. Visit [CalKIDS.org](https://CalKIDS.org) for more information to see if they qualify."

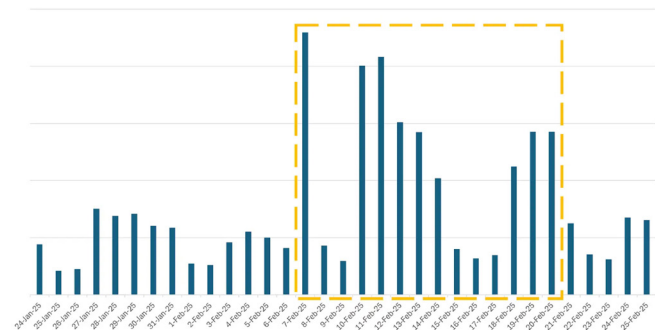
The audiences for these communications overlap heavily in terms of eligibility for CalKIDS, contributing to a very impactful campaign.

Outcomes include:

- CalKIDS site traffic increased by 171% and unique users increased by 141% when compared to the period before the campaign.
- Pixels were placed for retargeting people who visited the site via the campaign, making it easier to advertise CalKIDS to them in the future.
- The second wave of the campaign accounted for 11% of total claims during the period.

These results (reflected in the time frame highlighted in the yellow box below), underscore the significant impact of delivering the right message to the right audience via the right channels.

### CalKIDS Website Traffic (1/24/25–2/25/25)



### Broader Implications for Public Engagement

This pilot proposes a replicable model for effective outreach integration across public systems that already serve CalKIDS-eligible families, such as WIC, Medi-Cal and school districts.

It also affirmed the importance of message design and segmentation. When outreach is targeted and crafted with intention — culturally competent, linguistically tailored and context-aware — it drives stronger engagement than general announcements.

# IMPLEMENTATION AT-A-GLANCE

Strategy Recommendation

		NEW Public funding	Philanthropic funding	May require legislation	State Treasurer's Office	Early Wealth Partnership	Local CSA, CBO or Vendor	CalKIDS Institute at UCLA	Achievable within 12 months*	Achievable over 2-3 years*
<b>01</b>	<b>Partnerships</b>									
1	Outreach & Engagement Grant Program		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓
2	Community(s) of practice and technical assistance		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Advocacy for state budget and legislation		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓
4	Partner with Public TK-12 Education System		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
5	Partner with Public Post-Secondary System		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
6	Partner with family-serving public agencies			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
7	CalKIDS Institute at UCLA	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓
8	HOPE financial education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
<b>02</b>	<b>Communications</b>									
1	Marketing Materials Virtual Clearinghouse	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
2	Communications Toolkit		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
3	Leverage the input of children, youth and families		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Train-the-Trainer Program		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
5	Integrate into state-mandated financial education				✓				✓	
6	Mail annual statements to CalKIDS families	✓			✓					✓
<b>03</b>	<b>Accounts &amp; Balances</b>									
1	CalKIDS appeals process and new account funding	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
2	Fund CalKIDS foster care deposits	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
3	Community Contributions Program		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
4	System for opening CalKIDS accounts with outside funding				✓	✓	✓			✓
5	Simplify set up of CalKIDS-linked ScholarShare accounts				✓		✓			✓
6	Enable cash deposits into ScholarShare 529		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
7	Sustain core funding for CalKIDS and HOPE accounts				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>04</b>	<b>Data</b>									
1	Improve Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) data				✓			✓		✓
2	Publish aggregate CalKIDS data by school and district				✓			✓	✓	✓
3	C2C Data System and CSAC for data sharing				✓			✓	✓	✓
4	Use local school district data for outreach						✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>05</b>	<b>Technology</b>									
1	Enhance navigation and visibility		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
2	Streamline online access to all early wealth-building accounts	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
3	Explore migrating local CSA accounts onto CalKIDS		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
4	Improve mobile responsiveness		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
5	Optimize text messaging		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
6	Allow phone numbers to be used for sign-in verification		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
<b>06</b>	<b>Implementation &amp; Funding</b>									
1	Early Wealth Partnership and operations		✓			✓			✓	✓
2	Formative impact evaluation and reports		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓

\* Checks in both columns (achievable in year 1 and over 2-3 years) indicates "established in year 1 and ongoing."

## ESTABLISH AN OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT GRANTS PROGRAM

### Context

**Early wealth-building programs realize their full potential only when children and families are aware of and engaged with them.** While CalKIDS and HOPE have achieved much in just a few years, their relatively small teams cannot directly reach the millions of eligible families across California's diverse communities. To bridge this gap, community-based organizations (CBOs) and local CSA programs — with their deep local trust and established relationships — are best positioned to provide hands-on outreach and claiming support.

The proposed Outreach and Engagement Grants Program builds upon the success of a previous \$5 million, two-year round of funding from the State of California for local CSA programs to promote CalKIDS alongside their own programs. Grantees used those funds to translate materials, partner with schools, host community events and help families retrieve necessary student information such as SSIDs. The proposed grants program will broaden eligibility to include a wide range of community-based organizations in addition to local CSA programs, and will aim to cross-promote CalKIDS, the HOPE program and, where available, local CSAs.

The Outreach and Engagement Grants Program will ensure that outreach efforts are tailored to meet the needs of local populations. Effective engagement requires the right messaging, messengers and communications channels; what works in one community may not work in another. With this grants program, California can invest in culturally competent engagement and reach youth and families directly, increasing participation and impact.

Deep collaboration between state and local outreach efforts to promote CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs is critical. We will align large scale marketing and messaging campaigns organized by the State Treasurer's Office with on the ground technical assistance to families provided by community-based organizations. And we will leverage geographic and demographic analysis of where outreach efforts are most needed to target our grantmaking. Given the upcoming launch of the HOPE program in early 2026, engaging the foster care involved and COVID-bereaved youth eligible for this program will be a priority.

### Implementation

We propose a \$5–7 million annual initiative, awarding 20–30 multi-year grants to nonprofits with experience in education, financial empowerment, college access or related fields. The Early Wealth Partnership will serve as the grant administrator, overseeing the development of the RFP, receiving and evaluating proposals and distributing funds. Selection criteria will prioritize organizations with strong, established relationships with children and families, a clear and effective outreach strategy to engage hard to reach populations and the capacity to successfully implement their proposed initiatives. Applicants will be encouraged to explain how their proposal would be informed by input from children, youth and families.

To ensure success and build long-term capacity, grantees will receive technical assistance from the Early Wealth Partnership, CalKIDS and HOPE teams, and participate in the proposed Early Wealth Accounts Communities of Practice. They will also help develop the Early Wealth Accounts Communications Toolkit, building a shared resource for communications and outreach. This approach supports both immediate outreach goals and a lasting ecosystem of local leaders and trusted messengers committed to advancing wealth-building opportunities for California families.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Source: Private</li><li>• Estimated 3-year cost: \$15–20 million</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li><li>• CBOs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Established year 1 and ongoing</li></ul>

### Indicators of Impact

- Number of CalKIDS/local CSA/HOPE awareness and claiming events hosted
- Number of new CalKIDS/local CSA/HOPE claimed with grantee assistance
- Increase in CalKIDS/local CSA/HOPE claiming in the localities (school, district, county) where activities took place

### Additional Resources

- NYC Kids RISE received a grant from the BlackRock Foundation to [partner with four CBOs](#)
- [Kindergarten to College Student and Family Outreach RFP](#) provides a useful model
- [Advancing CalKIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation's Largest College Savings Account Program](#), by former Oakland Mayor, Libby Schaaf, describes the success of the prior round of grant funding to outreach partners and calls for continued work with community partners

## EARLY WEALTH-BUILDING ACCOUNTS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

### Context

**To strengthen collaboration and knowledge-sharing in the early wealth-building accounts field, we recommend establishing one or more Early Wealth-Building Accounts Communities of Practice.** In our interviews for the CEWAS Plan, we heard a great deal of enthusiasm for more opportunities for coordination and peer learning. Our proposed Communities of Practice will build on the work of the existing California CSA Coalition — which convenes representatives from local CSA programs — but will also be open to the non-CSA organizations that are critical to the success of the field, such as those related to early childhood education, financial education and college access. All organizations receiving CEWAS Outreach and Engagement Grants will be invited to participate, as will key partners in public agencies and school districts.

The varied needs of different partners — and the overall scale of engagement — may call for establishing multiple Communities of Practice. One or two Communities could focus specifically on TK–12 schools and post-secondary education institutions, operating alongside a more general Community of Practice for local CSA programs and other community-based outreach and engagement partners.

Key components of this Community of Practice will include regular virtual meetings, expert-led workshops and an online platform (such as Slack, Discord, or a listserv) where members can connect asynchronously to ask questions and share updates. Additionally, we propose an annual in-person convening to bring stakeholders together for networking and capacity building.

Beyond ongoing learning, the Communities of Practice will play a crucial role in advancing the movement for college access. We recommend organizing a California Early Wealth-Building Awareness campaign — potentially during College Savings Month (September) or Financial Literacy Month (April) — to unify messaging, promote account uptake and engage families through media, events and grassroots outreach.

### Implementation

To implement this strategy, the Early Wealth Partnership will issue a Request for Proposals to identify one or two organizations with the experience, infrastructure and relationships necessary to lead the Early Wealth-Building Accounts Communities of Practice. The selected organization(s) will be responsible for coordinating the Communities and providing technical assistance to members over a three-year period. Proposers would be asked to outline how they would recruit participants, structure meetings and support collaboration and alignment with CEWAS goals.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Source: Private</li><li>• Estimated 3-year cost: \$1.5 million</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li><li>• CBOs</li><li>• CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li></ul>	Established year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- **High and sustained engagement across all target sectors:** Success could be measured through meeting attendance rates, platform activity (e.g., posts, resource sharing), and participation from new or previously underrepresented organizations
- **Participant feedback:** In surveys, Community of Practice participants report they find the meetings valuable, have forged meaningful new connections within the early wealth-building accounts field, and have successfully applied the insights gained to enhance their own programs or initiatives

### Additional Resources

- [California Child Savings Account Coalition](#)
- [Advancing CalKIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation's Largest College Savings Account Program:](#) Interviews found that “Current CalKIDS outreach partners hunger for more coordination and learning opportunities with CalKIDS as well as more formalized opportunities for local CSA practitioners and experts to guide future program development and implementation”
- [First 5 Association of California](#), a membership association representing First 5 Commissions that could serve as a template for the Early Wealth-Building Accounts Communities of Practice

## ADVOCACY FOR STATE FUNDING AND LEGISLATION

### Context

**California's early wealth-building programs — CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs — represent groundbreaking investments in equitable asset-building.** However, significant barriers prevent these programs from fully reaching the communities they are intended to serve, particularly under-resourced populations. Meanwhile, a complicated political environment and constrained budgets make it harder for public agencies to sustain and expand these initiatives without stronger policy backing and infrastructure.

While some of the strategies identified in the CEWAS Plan can be implemented with existing resources and without legislative action, others will require an increase in state funding and changes to policy and/or legislation. For example, adding the CalKIDS' \$500 foster care contribution to grades 1–12 (see page 36), will cost an estimated \$6 million in the first year (to “catch up” children who have missed this opportunity since 2022) and \$2.4 million annually thereafter. Similarly, our recommendation to mail annual CalKIDS statements (see page 33), with account balances to all participants will cost \$4 million annually. Neither of these important program enhancements currently have a state budget allocation.

A change to the CalKIDS authorizing legislation may be needed to implement our recommendation to open new CalKIDS accounts (see page 38), for otherwise ineligible children when outside resources are available to fund them. Authorization to open new accounts will be a necessary prerequisite to the Community Contributions Program (see page 37), and to migrating local CSA accounts onto the CalKIDS platform (see page 51).

Advocacy and state budget appropriations will also be necessary to sustain annual state funding for new CalKIDS and HOPE accounts and to fulfill the vision of expanding eligibility for HOPE to all low-income children in California. HOPE has been allocated \$145 million in state funding to date, but will require as much as \$115 million more to provide the targeted \$4,500 to each of the estimated 58,000 eligible youth, and more as additional kids in foster care become eligible. Fulfilling the aspiration of the HOPE authorizing legislation to reach all poor children in California with an adequate account will require as much as \$4 billion a year, the identification of an adequate and sustainable funding stream and a multiyear policy development and advocacy effort.

### Implementation

The Early Wealth Partnership will allocate a portion of the philanthropic funds raised to support legislator education on the state budget decisions, legislation and regulatory practices needed to fully implement the CEWAS Plan. One or more organizations will be selected to lead this work over a three-year period.

This funding would support:

- Policy and communications staffing for grantees and their partners
- Development of policy briefs, data visualizations and legislative toolkits
- Convenings with agency leaders and legislators
- Strategic communications (e.g., narrative research, earned media, video storytelling)

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Source: Private</li><li>• Estimated 3-year cost: \$2.5 million</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li><li>• CBOs</li></ul>	Established in year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Sustained core state funding to fund CalKIDS and HOPE accounts
- Line items in annual State budgets to expand early wealth-building infrastructure per CEWAS Plan
- Legislation introduced (and passed) and administrative regulations modified to implement the CEWAS Plan strategies as needed
- A funding plan for expansion of HOPE accounts to all low-income children in California

## STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH PUBLIC TK–12 EDUCATION

### Context

**By the start of the 2025–26 school year, there will have been four waves of CalKIDS recipients who became eligible while enrolled in a public TK–12 school, and there will likely be well over 2 million CalKIDS account holders from those four waves who will be enrolled in grades 2–12.** However, a large majority of these accounts have not yet been claimed.

Although students and families may learn about CalKIDS or HOPE through direct communications from the State Treasurer’s Office or other promotional campaigns led by the state or local community-based organizations, TK–12 school systems are uniquely positioned to build awareness of and encourage students to participate in these programs. First, school staff often enjoy sustained relationships with families, extending over many years of a child’s school career. As a result, they may come to be viewed as a trusted source of information, something that is very important for families to take action. Second, in addition to helping build this trust, those sustained relationships may also offer many opportunities to introduce and promote programs. Finally, schools can integrate information about CalKIDS — along with other early wealth-building accounts, such as HOPE and any local CSA program — into broader efforts to promote financial literacy and capability.

In a recent survey of current post-secondary students with a CalKIDS account, 43% reported that they first learned about CalKIDS through their high school — far more than for any other information source. Schools are thus a critical partner in promoting early wealth-building accounts.

### Implementation

Building the capacity TK–12 school systems to promote awareness and engagement with CalKIDS, local CSA programs and HOPE accounts is a priority of the CEWAS Plan. The CalKIDS Institute at UCLA is currently engaged in an effort to document practices of districts and counties that have demonstrated high claim rates. This work will continue, and lessons from the research will be used in the development of implementation guides. These guides will suggest activities to promote broad staff awareness of CalKIDS, local CSA program offerings (where available) and HOPE accounts. They will provide recommendations for integrating early wealth-building programs into school activities and curricula.

To support local implementation, the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA will seek to identify a point of contact within each County Office of Education. These individuals will be invited to participate in a TK–12 Community of Practice (see page 19), with other county champions for early wealth-building accounts. They will be asked to help develop, pilot test (within the districts they support) and refine the implementation guides.

The CalKIDS Institute and Community of Practice will also develop trainings for a broad range of school staff — including teachers, counselors and administrators. These trainings may address topics such as the state’s financial literacy curriculum standards and financial aid resources and information available through the California Student Aid Commission. The goal of these efforts is that promotion of student participation in early wealth-building will be viewed as a shared responsibility of all school staff. This, in turn, may lead to increased family engagement and higher account claim rates.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Private</li> <li>• Estimated 3-year cost: \$600,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> <li>• State Treasurer’s Office</li> <li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li> </ul>	Established year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Number of counties participating in TK–12 Community of Practice
- Increased awareness and understanding of CalKIDS among TK–12 school staff
- Increased CalKIDS account claims among students currently enrolled in TK–12 schools

### Additional Resources

- [Advancing CalKIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation’s Largest College Savings Account Program](#)
- [California Department of Education: Grades TK–12 Financial Literacy Resources](#)
- [EdSource: Getting California’s students to access free money relies on community partnerships](#)
- [CalKIDS Institute at UCLA: Initial Report: An Examination of Post-Secondary Students Who Have Used CalKIDS Funds](#)

## STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH PUBLIC POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

### Context

**As part of the initial CalKIDS rollout, accounts were established for approximately 3.4 million public school students enrolled in grades 1–12 during the 2021–22 school year, including about 870,000 in grades 10–12.**

Most of these older students have since completed high school, and many have enrolled in post-secondary education. According to the California Department of Education, 62% of high school graduates from that year enrolled in a post-secondary institution within 12 months — including 54% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, who were eligible for CalKIDS.

Although the exact number of CalKIDS account holders currently enrolled in post-secondary institutions is unknown, it likely includes several hundred thousand students — most attending California public colleges and universities. Among 2021–22 high school graduates, 52% enrolled in a California Community College (CCC), 19% in a California State University (CSU) and 12% in a University of California (UC) campus.

Despite these enrollment numbers, most eligible students from the 2021–22 cohort have not claimed their CalKIDS accounts. Fewer than 100,000 students have requested disbursements for post-secondary expenses. Some students — particularly those planning to transfer from a community college to a CSU or UC campus — report waiting to use their funds in anticipation of higher future costs.

In short, many students enrolled in California's public higher education systems have CalKIDS accounts they are unaware of. This number will grow as new graduating classes include roughly 300,000 CalKIDS account holders annually. However, the window for claiming funds is limited — accounts must be used before the beneficiary turns 26, a deadline now fewer than five years away for the oldest participants.

To reach these students, CalKIDS must establish strong partnerships within the state's higher education systems. Accessing these funds could significantly help students stay enrolled and reduce their reliance on loans. In a recent study by the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA, 46% of students strongly agreed that CalKIDS funds helped meet short-term financial needs, and 37% strongly agreed that it made continuing their education easier.

### Implementation

The State Treasurer's Office and the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA will work together to engage financial aid offices across all California Community Colleges, CSU and UC campuses. Their goal is to ensure staff are informed about CalKIDS eligibility and are equipped to help students check their status and claim their accounts. This includes delivering trainings, developing electronic outreach materials (e.g., templates, flyers, videos) and supporting systemwide communication efforts.

As CalKIDS account data becomes integrated into the Cradle-to-Career Data System and the California Student Aid Communication platforms, the Treasurer's Office and the CalKIDS Institute will train financial aid staff on how to access and use these tools for targeted outreach.

The partners will also collaborate with campus-based programs that serve populations most likely to hold CalKIDS accounts. They will develop materials and conduct trainings for staff within these programs.

All three public higher education systems offer Basic Needs support, and many campuses also run equity-focused programs. At CCCs, these include the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) and the Foster Youth Success Initiative. Outreach at CSU and UC campuses will include the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and the Student Academic Preparation and Educational Partnerships (SAPEP), which includes 13 college access programs.

These efforts will expand awareness and support among students already enrolled in college — many of whom may be especially receptive to learning about CalKIDS. Delivered through trusted campus partners, this information can help students access funds that directly support their current needs.

Beginning in 2026, HOPE account funds will also be available to eligible young adults, some of whom will enroll in California's post-secondary institutions. After the HOPE program launch, the CalKIDS post-secondary outreach strategies should expand to include HOPE-eligible students as well.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Private</li> <li>• Estimated 3-year cost: \$600,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> <li>• State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li> </ul>	Established year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Number of contacts made with financial aid and program staff
- Number of trainings held, number of campus staff participating in trainings
- Increased awareness and understanding of CalKIDS among campus financial aid and program staff
- Increased CalKIDS account claims among students currently enrolled in post-secondary education
- Increased utilization of CalKIDS funds by students currently enrolled in post-secondary education

### Additional Resources

- [Basic Needs Programs at California Community Colleges](#)
- [Basic Needs Programs at California State Universities](#)
- [Basic Needs Programs at University of California campuses](#)
- [CSU Extended Opportunity Programs and Services](#)
- [UC Student Academic Preparation and Educational Partnerships](#)
- [CalKIDS Institute at UCLA: Initial Report: An Examination of Post-Secondary Students Who Have Used CalKIDS Funds](#)

## PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILY-SERVING PUBLIC AGENCIES

### Context

**California's state and local public agencies have direct and trusted relationships with many families with newborns and young children that can be leveraged to promote CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs.**

Local CSA programs have led the way in building effective partnerships with public agencies and offer valuable lessons for the newer CalKIDS and HOPE programs. For example, as described in the Case Study on page 14, Semillitas' innovative partnership with Central California Alliance for Health, their regional Medi-Cal provider, was a precursor to the Beyond Covered initiative described below. Oakland Promise's collaboration with the Alameda Health System through which new parents are offered Brilliant Baby CSAs and parenting supports offers another approach that could be scaled statewide. The proposed Early Wealth-Building Programs Communities of Practice (see page 19), will help elevate and share these successful models, harnessing the existing wisdom and innovation within the field to strengthen and scale impact statewide.

### California Department of Social Services (CDSS)

The CDSS Case Study on page 16 describes the outreach campaign the department conducted in Spring 2025 to promote CalKIDS to families receiving CalWORKS (cash assistance) and CalFresh (food assistance). Notifications were sent via text and email to over 3.4 million families in their preferred language. CalKIDS reported a 171% increase in website traffic during the outreach campaign, demonstrating the potential of this type of partnership. CDSS will also be working closely with the HOPE program to provide information on eligible foster youth so HOPE can set aside funds for them. CDSS will also send a report of eligible youth to each county, enabling them to help youth claim their accounts.

### Covered California

Covered California, a partner of the California Department of Health Care Services, is a marketplace that connects individuals and families to free or low-cost health insurance. The program's [Beyond Covered](#) initiative encourages parents of children under age two to meet certain healthcare milestones, such as vaccinations and pediatric visits, by making \$25–\$150 bonus deposits into children's CalKIDS accounts — up to \$1,000 total. Launched in 2025, the initiative is expected to reach 2,500–3,000 children. It offers an exciting opportunity to both embed CalKIDS outreach and engagement in another trusted public agency and to build the CalKIDS account balances of children by rewarding

participation in preventive medical care. Although still in Phase I of outreach, the pilot shows strong early results: 98% of Beyond Covered enrollees to date newly created CalKIDS accounts, meaning Covered California has helped families claim over \$16,000 in their first college scholarships within weeks of the program's launch.

### California Department of Public Health — Vital Records Division and local vital records offices

The State Treasurer's Office has partnerships with county records departments in Berkeley, Sonoma, San Benito, Riverside, Monterey and Fresno to send CalKIDS brochures with birth certificates. These partnerships will be further strengthened through the CEWAS Plan's Marketing Materials Virtual Clearinghouse strategy (see page 27), creating a streamlined process for sharing information with families.

### California Department of Public Health — Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Division

The Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) Division promotes the health and well-being of California's families through grants and technical support to the state's 61 local health jurisdictions. MCAH has invited CalKIDS and Oakland Promise to present at its regular convenings of local health directors to explore opportunities for partnership.

### First 5 California

In 1998, California voters passed Proposition 10, adding a 50-cent tax to each pack of cigarettes to create First 5 California, which aims to improve the lives of young children and their families through a network of education, health and childcare services. Each of California's 58 counties is funded to run a local First 5 County Commission, empowering them to address local needs. First 5 California has hosted the State Treasurer's Office at its conference and has included CalKIDS information in packets distributed to local First 5 Commissions, which can then share this information directly with families. Some local CSA programs have independently built First 5 partnerships — for example, Semillitas (see Case Study on page 14), partners with First 5 Santa Cruz County, which conducts hospital visits to newborn families, shares Semillitas information and collects contact details for follow-up outreach.

**Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**

WIC programs provide free food, education and support to mothers from their child’s birth until age five. CalKIDS has built a positive relationship with the California WIC Association, a nonprofit that convenes directors of local WIC agencies. The Association has provided CalKIDS with opportunities to present to its members. This model of partnership presents a promising opportunity for replication by other early wealth-building programs to expand their reach and impact.

These initial partnerships are examples of the power of inter-agency collaboration. Learnings from Beyond Covered California, the CDSS texting campaign and local agencies’ dissemination of materials will inform future partnerships.

**Implementation**

The State Treasurer’s Office, HOPE and local CSA programs will each lead state and local partnerships relevant to their programs.

The CEWAS Plan’s recommendation to develop a Marketing Materials Virtual Clearinghouse (see page 27), will facilitate these partnerships with state and local agencies by providing agencies with easy access to print-ready outreach materials. For example, when additional local vital records offices volunteer to disseminate CalKIDS information, they will have a simple, standardized process to request brochures and resources.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Source: Public</li><li>• Estimated 3-year cost: Use existing resources</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State Treasurer’s Office</li><li>• Local CSAs</li><li>• CBOs</li></ul>	Established in year 1 and ongoing

**Indicators of Impact**

- Increase in CalKIDS claiming activity correlating with partners’ outreach activities
- High participation rates in initiatives like Beyond Covered California
- First 5 Commissions and local public agencies order from the Marketing Materials Virtual Clearinghouse

**Additional Resources**

- [Advancing CalKIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation’s Largest College Savings Account Program](#) recommends that California “integrate CalKIDS along with other family-serving benefits and make them all easier to access”
- State Treasurer’s Office ScholarShare Investment Board [memo](#) authorizing the acceptance of payments for Beyond Covered

## UTILIZE THE CALKIDS INSTITUTE AT UCLA

### Context

**The CalKIDS Institute at UCLA (CalKIDS Institute) was established by an allocation of state funds in the 2022 budget to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).** The CalKIDS Institute's mandate is to advance socioeconomic justice by amplifying and evaluating the CalKIDS program. It is housed within UCLA's School of Education & Information Studies, and aims to fulfill this mandate by serving as a central hub for information, innovation, policy and practice for CalKIDS and other early wealth-building programs.

CalKIDS Institute activities broadly fall within four categories:

1. Collaboration and Partnership
2. Innovation and Replicable Programs
3. Research and Evaluation
4. Policy Advancement

Collaboration and partnership has included participation in local, regional and national convenings related to early wealth-building accounts. The CalKIDS Institute seeks to support the efforts of local CalKIDS champions and to foster peer learning communities. Innovations and replicable programs have included working with organizations on the UCLA campus to pilot educational campaigns focused on reaching students who have CalKIDS accounts. The materials developed and lessons learned from these pilots will inform efforts to bring such campaigns to campuses statewide.

The CalKIDS Institute also seeks to be a key research and evaluation partner to the State Treasurer's Office and ScholarShare Investment Board. It recently collaborated with Treasurer's Office on a study of post-secondary students' experiences with CalKIDS and has supported analysis of CalKIDS claims data from the first three years of program implementation. The CalKIDS Institute is also engaging in research to document organizational supports that promote high rates of program participation and conducting a scoping literature review that will inform the development of a longer-term agenda for research about CalKIDS. The CalKIDS Institute's efforts to advance policy involve participation in advisory groups and steering committees, providing feedback on administrative practices and generating recommendations for program refinement.

### Implementation

State funds from the 2022 budget allocation established the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA and supported its first three years of work. Additional funding is now sought in order to sustain the CalKIDS Institute's ongoing research and evaluation efforts and the implementation of CEWAS Plan over the coming years. The Institute will have a leading role in pursuing several of the plan's identified goals which are closely aligned with the CalKIDS Institute's strategic priorities. The CalKIDS Institute will continue to pursue those priorities, working in close collaboration with the State Treasurer's Office and the Early Wealth Partnership, contributing to the success of CalKIDS and the broader early wealth-building efforts.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Source: Public</li><li>• Estimated 3-year cost: \$1.5 million</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li><li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li></ul>	Ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- CalKIDS Institute products: research publications, training materials, resources
- Participation of program partners in CalKIDS Institute events
- Implementation of recommended strategies in the CEWAS Plan

### Additional Resources

- [CalKIDS Institute at UCLA](#)
- [CalKIDS Institute at UCLA: Initial Report: An Examination of Post-Secondary Students Who Have Used CalKIDS Funds](#)

## MARKETING MATERIALS VIRTUAL CLEARINGHOUSE

### Context

**Through interviews with CalKIDS, HOPE, local CSA programs and outreach partners, we learned that a wide range of outreach materials already exist, including everything from flyers and banners to yard signs.**

However, we also heard consistent feedback that while printed materials are often highly effective, access to them is inconsistent. In one example, a CalKIDS outreach partner successfully persuaded their local Vital Records office to distribute flyers alongside birth certificate applications — yet neither the partner nor CalKIDS had the budget to print the materials. Outreach through the Vital Records office could reach thousands of parents annually, but this opportunity remains unrealized due to funding gaps.

This example highlights a clear opportunity: Establishing a shared, online repository of outreach materials — coupled with dedicated funding for printing — is a low-cost, high-impact strategy. Community-based organizations and public agencies are eager to share information about CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSAs, but the burden of finding, customizing and funding printed materials frequently deters action.

A Marketing Materials Virtual Clearinghouse would provide a one-stop shop for promoting all of California's early wealth-building programs, thereby encouraging cross-promotion. A user may access the online clearinghouse intending to download CalKIDS materials but leave the site with materials for HOPE and their local CSA program as well. With funding support for printing costs, this resource could dramatically increase visibility and uptake, especially in under-resourced communities.

### Implementation

The first step of implementation would be to conduct a comprehensive inventory of existing outreach materials for CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs. This would involve identifying high-quality assets already in use, while also noting any content gaps or areas that require updates. Once compiled and vetted, these materials would be organized and uploaded to a centralized, user-friendly online platform. The platform would allow users to search and download print-ready files based on criteria such as program (e.g., CalKIDS, HOPE, K2C), target audience (e.g., parents of newborns, school-aged children) and language. To support local adaptation, the site would also include versioning guidance and templates for customizing certain materials with local contact information, logos, or event details.

Effective management of printing and distribution is key to the success of this approach. One implementation option would be to offer small grants to community agencies and public partners to print and distribute the materials most relevant to their audiences. Alternatively, or in parallel, a centralized fulfillment model could be established, enabling partners to order materials directly from the platform for delivery, removing the burden of local printing altogether.

Given that the clearinghouse may eventually house materials for up to 17 early wealth-building programs — with versions for different age groups, languages and audiences — it will be essential to build a robust organizational structure within the platform. Implementers should invest early in metadata tagging, intuitive navigation and regular updates to ensure partners can easily find the materials most appropriate for their needs.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Private</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$500,000</li> <li>Source: Public</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$2 million</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> </ul>	Established year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Number of materials ordered or downloaded
- Number of entities ordering or downloading materials
- Website traffic for the Marketing Materials Virtual Clearinghouse

### Additional Resources

#### California early wealth-building resources:

- [CalKIDS Marketing Toolkit](#)
- [Advancing CalKIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation's Largest College Savings Account Program](#)

#### Examples of resource materials clearinghouses from other CSA programs:

- NYC Kids RISE Save for College Program, [Downloadable Resources](#) and [Translated Graphics for Partners](#)
- Keystone Scholars, [Partner Resources](#)
- My Alford Grant, [Downloadable Materials](#)
- Massachusetts BabySteps, [Materials Clearinghouse](#)

## COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

### Context

**California's various early wealth-building program staff and partners are knowledgeable about how to reach and engage families.** The challenge now is to systematically capture, refine and share these ideas and best practices. The proposed Communication Toolkit and Technical Assistance initiative will provide a cohesive set of materials, messaging guidance and outreach strategies to support community-based organizations, local CSA programs, TK–12 schools, state colleges and other partners in engaging families. Building on the existing California CSA Coalition toolkit, this expanded resource will integrate insights from the CEWAS Plan, local CSA programs and elsewhere in the asset-building field. It will help unify outreach efforts for CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs while allowing for customization based on language, culture and accessibility needs.

The toolkit will be an online resource available to all. It will include pre-written, ready-to-adapt content to facilitate shared messaging and save partners time. Partners seeking fully turnkey materials will be able to access them via the proposed Marketing Materials Virtual Clearinghouse (see page 27). For partners looking for inspiration and ideas, the toolkit would include sample materials — such as banners, radio spots, rack cards and text messages — from previous outreach campaigns.

Beyond materials, the toolkit will include best practices for effective communication, informed by message testing, behavioral science and direct input from diverse communities. It will offer strategies for reaching undocumented and mixed-status families, youth experiencing homelessness and foster youth, as well as practical guidance on translation, document accessibility, reading level considerations and culturally relevant messaging. The toolkit will also provide statistics supporting CSAs and guidance on using CSA research.

### Implementation

**Developing the toolkit will be a collaborative process designed to ensure broad buy-in and long-term usability.**

A lead organization will be funded with CEWAS resources to spearhead the development and maintenance of the toolkit. Once built, the toolkit will live online on websites hosted by the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA, the California CSA Coalition and other to-be-identified organizations. To keep the resource dynamic and relevant, there will be a process for partners to submit feedback, propose updates and contribute new materials based on real-world experience.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Private</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$200,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>CBOs</li> <li>CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> </ul>	Achievable over 2–3 years

### Indicators of Impact

- Number of organizations participating in the development and review of the toolkit
- Website traffic to the toolkit site

### Additional Resources

**Existing California early wealth-building accounts toolkits and resources:**

- [California Hope, Opportunity, Perseverance and Empowerment \(HOPE\) Children Trust Account program: Report Summary](#)
- [California Children Savings Accounts \(CA CSA\) Toolkit 2024](#)
- [CalKIDS Marketing Toolkit](#)
- [San Francisco K2C Outreach Toolkit](#)
- Bright Futures, [Train-the-Trainer Toolkit](#)

**Other sample toolkits and resources:**

- [Michigan CSA Network Program Toolkit](#)
- NYC Kids RISE Save for College, [School Guide and Toolkit](#)
- Roadmap to College, [Guide to Creating a College Going Culture](#)
- Massachusetts [BabySteps Outreach Toolkit](#)
- [Philadelphia Equitable Inclusion Toolkit](#)
- [NextUp Implementation Tools](#)
- [Advertising a Policy Initiative to Encourage College Savings: The Role of Ad Content and Timing](#): Research on Illinois' First Steps program
- [Behavioral Concepts](#) from the Center for Advanced Hindsight
- [Influencing Behaviour](#): The Mindspace Way

## LEVERAGE THE INPUT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

### Context

**Early wealth-building programs are most impactful when they are shaped by the voices of the children, youth and families they are intended to benefit.** Participant input can surface unseen challenges: Families can identify barriers (such as confusing paperwork or jargony language) that professionals might overlook. Feedback on outreach and engagement materials and strategies can strengthen messaging, identifying and amplifying the messages that resonate with and motivate participants. Input can also help tailor programs to the cultural, social and economic realities of diverse communities, helping families from across California see early wealth-building accounts as “for” families like them. When people are invited to contribute ideas and feedback, they’re more likely to feel ownership over the initiative, turning passive beneficiaries into active champions. Over time, this participatory approach can cultivate lasting grassroots support for California’s early wealth-building accounts ecosystem.

Fortunately, California is rich with models that embed family and youth input into program design:

- **The HOPE program** is working to add two youth representatives to its board. As of publication, they have completed interviews for the positions and are in the process of solidifying the appointments via the legislative process. HOPE is also planning a youth ambassador program.
- **Semillitas**, a CSA program in Santa Cruz County, regularly convenes informal focus groups with parents and families to gather feedback on their materials. Participants are recruited from Semillitas’ “regulars” — the family members who most often attend program workshops and events — and are compensated for their time and expertise.
- **West Sacramento Home Run** collaborates with a local non-profit to offer a paid “teen promoter” initiative that hires young people already active in their communities to serve as peer ambassadors promoting CalKIDS, West Sacramento’s Ready, Set, Save! CSA program and scholarship opportunities. Teen promoters contribute to program strategy, table at community events and lead workshops at local high schools to help peers and families access their Home Run and CalKIDS accounts. Their firsthand familiarity with navigating student ID lookups and account claiming makes them especially effective liaisons. Many of the teens are also bilingual.
- **Bright Futures**, a cradle-to-career partnership in Monterey County, launched its CalKIDS outreach work by surveying community members to assess awareness, understanding and concerns about the program. The insights gathered from these surveys directly informed their messaging strategy and community engagement approach.

These examples illustrate that participant-centered engagement is not only possible — it’s already happening across California. The challenge and opportunity now is to scale and sustain these practices, ensuring that early wealth-building programs are consistently informed by those they benefit.

### Implementation

First and foremost, the organizations implementing and promoting CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs should incorporate and sustain participant voice into their programs. Many programs already recognize this as a core responsibility.

Leveraging the input of children, youth and families can also be embedded in other areas of the CEWAS Plan:

- Applicants to the Outreach & Engagement Grant Program (see page 18), will be encouraged to develop plans for gathering and incorporating participant feedback. This could include strategies such as youth ambassador programs, parent focus groups or survey research, with examples available for inspiration.
- The Early Wealth-Building Accounts Communities of Practice (see page 19), will showcase best practices from programs like HOPE, Semillitas and Ready, Set, Save!. These models will be shared through case studies, partner presentations and discussion sessions.
- Feedback collected from children, youth and families will directly inform updates to the Marketing Materials Virtual Clearinghouse (see page 27), and the Communications Toolkit (see page 28), ensuring that materials are clear, relevant and responsive to the needs of the communities these programs are designed to serve.

Additionally, if community partners identify a specific issue or opportunity aligned with the CEWAS Plan that would benefit from targeted youth or parent input — such as through focus groups or structured feedback — the Early Wealth Partnership may provide dedicated grants to help cover associated costs.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Private</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: The cost of participant input will be built into all funded CEWAS Plan strategies; as needed up to \$600,000 available for additional focus groups or input strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>CBOs</li> <li>CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> </ul>	Established year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Outreach and Engagement Grant Program recipients develop and implement plans to solicit and integrate participant feedback
- Community of Practice participants gain access to a robust set of tools, ideas and resources for incorporating family and youth voice into early wealth-building program design and engagement efforts

### Additional Resources

- [Barriers to Wealth Building and Perspectives on Baby Bonds in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston and Oakland](#): This Urban Institute report shares perspectives from young people on baby bonds, how they may want to spend funds and how they think the program could be successful
- [Advancing CalKIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation's Largest College Savings Account Program](#) includes insights from focus groups with parents of CalKIDS-eligible children

## TRAIN-THE-TRAINER PROGRAM

### Context

#### Promotion of CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs extends far beyond the staff running these programs.

Teachers, school liaisons, community leaders, parents and CBO staff already play a vital role in spreading awareness within their communities. This grassroots engagement is a powerful asset for California's early wealth-building account programs, and with the right support, its impact could be magnified.

One way to harness this energy is to develop a "Train-the-Trainer" program. The training will be designed for people in close contact with children and families, such as CBO staff (including those whose organizations are Outreach and Engagement Grant recipients), school staff, parent volunteers and even youth leaders. Participants will leave the training with the confidence to articulate the benefits of early asset-building and the skills to guide families in understanding and accessing all available early wealth-building account programs. Trained liaisons will not only strengthen outreach efforts but also create a reliable network of informed advocates employing shared messaging. Ultimately, this initiative would amplify awareness and participation, ensuring that more families can take full advantage of these early wealth-building opportunities.

For inspiration, implementers can turn to Bright Futures' robust Train-the-Trainer model, which equips school staff, counselors and partner organizations to conduct CalKIDS outreach effectively. Bright Futures has embedded CalKIDS education into their [Mi Vida Mi Futuro](#) initiative, which uses the *promotora* model to engage parents around college readiness. These strategies enable Bright Futures to reach students and families throughout Monterey County with information and support for college readiness, including assistance with claiming CalKIDS accounts.

### Implementation

Implementing the Train-the-Trainer program would begin with a grant to the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA, which would oversee program development and execution. In consultation with CalKIDS, local CSA program operators and HOPE, the CalKIDS Institute would determine the training modality — whether it would be offered synchronously or asynchronously, through what platform(s), and whether to offer a "refresher" course to reinforce learning over time. From there, they would build the curriculum, develop training materials, craft a promotional strategy to ensure widespread participation and determine metrics for assessing the program's impact.

A key priority would be recruiting a diverse group of participants, including individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as well as those connected to foster care and COVID-bereaved youth. Outreach efforts would focus on engaging CBOs, schools and trusted community networks to ensure that the training reaches those best positioned to support families. While the training would be unpaid, the CalKIDS Institute could offer a small incentive, such as a gift card drawing for participants who complete a post-training quiz. Additionally, organizations sending staff to the training could provide compensation, and recipients of CEWAS Outreach and Engagement Grants would be encouraged to budget staff time for participation.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Private</li> <li>• Estimated 3-year cost: \$1.5 million</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>• CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> </ul>	Established in year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Number of people trained annually
- Training completion rates
- Knowledge retention as measured by post-training assessments

### Additional Resources

- [Advancing CalKIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation's Largest College Savings Account Program](#): Interviews CBOS and school leaders indicated a desire for a train-the-trainer program
- Santa Cruz Ventures' [Futuro](#) program, which includes a worker cooperative of *promotoras*
- [San Francisco K2C Outreach Toolkit](#)

## INTEGRATE EARLY WEALTH-BUILDING ACCOUNTS INTO THE STATE-MANDATED FINANCIAL EDUCATION COURSE

### Context

Many early wealth-building programs in California and other states have partnered with schools and school districts to integrate financial education, post-secondary readiness and CSA awareness into classroom curricula and school-based activities. TK–12 schools offer a valuable platform to reach children and families with early wealth-building messages. However, while these partnerships hold significant potential, they are often difficult to implement and scale. Educators are frequently overloaded and under-resourced, making it challenging to take on new responsibilities. Even when strong partnerships are established at individual schools, replicating those models across districts or regions remains a persistent challenge.

California's new statewide financial literacy requirement presents a game-changing opportunity to equip all high school students with knowledge about early wealth-building accounts as part of their core education. In 2024, Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill (AB 2927) mandating a semester-long personal finance course for all high school students in the state. This course will begin rolling out in the 2027–28 school year and become a graduation requirement for the class of 2030–31. This policy shift creates a statewide platform to introduce students to concepts like saving, investing and postsecondary planning — and offers a natural entry point for incorporating CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA program information into the curriculum in a scalable way.

### Implementation

Curriculum development for California's new personal finance course is already underway, so the Treasurer's Office should work quickly to connect with the State Board of Education and push for the inclusion of lessons on asset-building and early wealth-building programs. In parallel, advocates should prepare to participate in the public comment period scheduled for October 2025 to amplify the call for early wealth-building program lessons.

The California Child Savings Account Coalition and the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA (specifically its Train-the-Trainer program) can advise the State Treasurer's Office and the State Board of Education on the content of lessons to explain early wealth-building program offerings. These lessons should highlight the benefits of post-secondary education, available financing options and how students can determine their eligibility for CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs. Educators teaching the course must be equipped to answer questions about the programs and to direct students to relevant resources. By working together, implementers and advocates can ensure the financial education curriculum aligns with state investments — and that every high school graduate understands the asset-building resources available to support their educational and economic future.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Public</li> <li>Estimated cost: No new funding required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer's Office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achievable within 12 months</li> </ul>

### Indicators of Impact

- Increase in CalKIDS account claiming rates among high school students following the course's implementation
- California students graduate high school with an understanding of asset-building and knowledge of the early wealth-building programs they may be eligible for

### Additional Resources

- California Governor's Office press release: [California to add financial literacy as a requirement to graduate high school](#)
- California Department of Education's [financial education course webpage](#), which provides a timeline for curriculum development
- [State Board of Education Members](#)

## MAIL ANNUAL STATEMENTS TO CALKIDS FAMILIES

### Context

**Early wealth-building programs have the potential to raise aspirations and nurture college-bound identities — but only if families know accounts exist for their children.**

To unlock the full benefits of these accounts, program administrators must ensure that families receive regular reminders through multiple touchpoints, delivered in ways that spark interest and engagement.

Unfortunately, many early wealth-building programs communicate with families at only two key moments: when a child first becomes eligible (typically at birth or entry into kindergarten) and upon disbursement after high school graduation. If a family overlooks the initial notice, they may go years without another reminder, missing the crucial window when early wealth-building programs can shape financial habits, educational goals and a child's sense of possibility.

One powerful and underutilized tool to bridge the communications gap is the annual account statement. Interviews with high school graduates from San Francisco's Kindergarten to College (K2C) program reveal that they remembered these mailings and that the statements reinforced the idea that money was set aside for them. This helped make the account feel real and personally meaningful. K2C's learnings can inform the work of both CalKIDS and HOPE: A bright, engaging annual statement can serve as a recurring touchpoint that builds awareness, reinforces purpose and keeps the programs top of mind for families as children grow up.

### Implementation

The State Treasurer's Office and the CalKIDS team will be responsible for implementing this strategy. The letter should be mailed at a consistent time each year, preferably aligning with family or school milestones, such as the start of the academic year.

The content and design of the letter are key to its impact. Rather than a standard financial statement, the letter will feel like a celebration of the child's future. It will include eye-catching visuals, child-friendly language and a positive, aspirational message that reinforces the account's purpose. The statements will also be tailored to the age of the account holders. Statements for younger children may be geared mostly towards parents, with only a simple message for the child. As the account holders enter their teenage years, the statement is an opportunity to speak directly to them about how to achieve their educational and career aspirations.

CalKIDS will pilot and iterate the mailing design based on feedback from families. Focus groups (funded through the Input from Children, Youth and Families strategy, see page 29), could test different formats and messaging styles to see what resonates most, to ensure the letter is not just received but read and remembered. Finally, future evaluations of CalKIDS and marketing studies may ask families if they recall receiving mailings and what impressions the materials left.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Public</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$15 million (\$5 million annually)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer's Office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achievable over 2–3 years</li> </ul>

### Indicators of Impact

- Increase in CalKIDS claiming rate
- Increase in engagement with accounts and program resources following the mailings
- Positive feedback and retention of mailings

### Additional Resources

- [Interviews with Mothers of Young Children in the SEED for Oklahoma Kids College Savings Experiment](#): Research from SEED OK, one of the most extensively studied CSA demonstrations in the country, found that quarterly statements reminded families about their accounts and prompted ongoing engagement
- [The Importance of Parent/Child Communications About Children's Savings Accounts for Developing a College-Bound Identity](#): Research on Wabash County's Promise Scholars CSA program (now Imagine Early) found that conversations between parents and children about their CSAs were associated with a stronger college-bound identity, an important predictor of future academic success

## CALKIDS APPEALS PROCESS/CORRECTION PROCEDURE

### Context

During the initial years of CalKIDS implementation, substantial effort has been devoted to raising awareness and encouraging account claims. The State Treasurer's Office and its partners have conducted outreach to inform eligible students and families about the program. As awareness has grown, students, parents and community partners have reported instances where a child believed to be eligible does not have a CalKIDS account or where the funding amount appears incorrect based on the child's status.

We propose a systematic review to assess how many children may be eligible for CalKIDS but have not received an account, estimate the cost of corrections, improve public understanding of eligibility criteria and implement a procedure to ensure all eligible students receive properly funded accounts.

These account issues are well known to the State Treasurer's Office and its partners. However, the scope of the problem remains unclear. There are several reasons a student or family might be unable to claim a CalKIDS account despite believing the student is eligible:

1. **Misunderstanding eligibility criteria** — Families may incorrectly assume a child qualifies.
2. **Timing of account creation** — A claim attempt may occur before the account has been established.
3. **Incorrect data entry** — Mismatches between submitted and recorded data can prevent successful claims.
4. **Incomplete or inaccurate eligibility data** — The state agency may lack necessary data to confirm eligibility or calculate funding accurately.
5. **Data processing errors** — Mistakes in entering, transmitting or interpreting data may prevent account creation or lead to incorrect funding.

Families facing these issues may experience frustration or confusion. While improved communication can help reduce issues related to misunderstanding, timing, or data entry (items 1–3), systemic solutions are needed for cases involving incomplete or incorrect eligibility data (items 4–5), which may constitute true programmatic errors.

### Implementation

To address the first three scenarios, the State Treasurer's Office should enhance communication about eligibility requirements, timelines for account creation and instructions for successful claims. This information should be accessible both before a claim attempt and at the point of a failed attempt. The CalKIDS portal should guide users on the correct data to enter and prompt verification before submission.

Addressing systemic issues (items 4 and 5) requires increasing awareness of how CalKIDS eligibility is determined and improving the quality of data used in those decisions. Unlike newborn eligibility, which is based solely on birthdate and place, student eligibility relies on multiple, evolving factors such as household income, English learner status, housing status and foster care involvement. These are captured through various sources including parent questionnaires, assessments and administrative records — some of which may be incomplete at the time of evaluation (e.g., Census Day). Improving the completeness of these data is essential as described in the CEWAS strategy to Improve Local Control Funding Formula Student-Level Data (see page 42).

Only the latter two scenarios (incomplete data or processing errors) warrant corrective action through a formal appeals process. Before launching such a process, the State Treasurer's Office and the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA should conduct a study to estimate:

- The proportion of students missing eligibility-related data
- The number likely to have been eligible if complete data were available
- The projected cost of funding additional accounts or adjusting existing ones

Based on these findings and once adequate funding is secured, the State Treasurer's Office should implement a formal appeals and correction process. The CalKIDS website should include clear instructions for submitting appeals and maintain a system for tracking submissions.

Corrections should not depend solely on family-initiated appeals. The State Treasurer's Office can partner with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the California Department of Education (CDE) to conduct periodic audits. These audits will identify children whose eligibility may have been missed due to incomplete data at the time of assessment but who meet criteria based on later-available information. CDPH and CDE can also review cases submitted through the appeals process and provide the State Treasurer's Office with the data needed to create or adjust accounts.

In cases where corrections are made, families should be notified using the same process as for newly established accounts. When appeals do not result in account creation or changes, families should also be informed of the outcome.

Together, these steps will ensure that CalKIDS accounts are accurately established and appropriately funded, improving program integrity, building trust with families and maximizing the program’s reach and impact. The annual estimated cost to seed new CalKIDS accounts identified through this process is approximately \$4 million.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Source: Public</li><li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$12 million</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>State Treasurer’s Office</li><li>CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Establish year 1 and ongoing</li></ul>

Indicators of Impact

- Number of appeals submitted by students or families
- Number of additional accounts created following review of eligibility

Additional Resources

- [CalKIDS Claim Page](#)
- [CalKIDS Eligibility Tool](#)
- [Advancing CalKIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation’s Largest College Savings Program](#): Recommends creating a process to add missing students to CalKIDS

## FULLY FUND CALKIDS FOSTER CARE DEPOSITS

### Context

**CalKIDS provides an enhanced deposit of \$500 to foster youth. Upon program launch, eligibility included all foster youth in grades 1–12 during the 2021–22 school year — creating a one-time “mega cohort.”** In the 2022–23 school year onward, new school-based CalKIDS enrollments and additional funds for children in foster care happen in the first grade only. This initial design excluded children who entered foster care after first grade following the mega cohort year. Thankfully, advocates and legislators stepped in with a fix: Sponsored by John Burton Advocates for Youth and signed into law in September 2024, AB 2508, requires CalKIDS to identify all students in grades 1–12 who may be newly eligible for the \$500 foster care enhancement each year. However, this expansion remains contingent on annual budget appropriations.

Importantly, while the foster youth eligibility fix is now in statute, a similar gap remains for homeless students. Closing the gap for students who lose their housing will require a similar legislative amendment and sustained funding. Advocates must engage in the state budget process each year and estimate the affected population to support appropriation requests.

### Implementation

Early wealth-building advocates must ensure that legislators understand both the transformative potential of programs like CalKIDS and the critical gaps created by initial eligibility design, allowing children who enter foster care after first grade to fall through the cracks. Advocates should also underscore the state’s unique obligation to support children in its care. The State Treasurer’s Office will be the appropriate leader in the effort to advance budget requests funding the expanded foster care contributions, with active support from advocates.

Fully funding foster youth deposits would also build momentum for pursuing similar legislative and funding solutions for homeless students, who face profound systemic barriers and could greatly benefit from a larger investment in their CalKIDS accounts.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Public</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$11 million</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer’s Office</li> <li>Advocacy CBOs</li> </ul>	Establish year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Annual budget appropriations secured for expanded foster care deposits

### Additional Resources

- [CalKIDS Program Information Guide](#)
- [AB 2508 — CalKIDS Foster Youth Eligibility](#): Fact sheet from California State Assemblymember Kevin McCarty
- Full text of [Assembly Bill No. 2508](#)
- John Burton Advocates for Youth: [Memo regarding AB 2508](#)

## COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS PROGRAM

### Context

**CalKIDS, HOPE and California’s local CSA programs all provide seed funding to establish accounts for eligible children and youth.** In the case of CalKIDS and some of the local programs, families can also contribute their own savings to linked accounts. However, there is currently no established system for third parties to contribute to the CalKIDS accounts of children in their communities.

The CEWAS Plan’s “Community Contributions” program will allow organizations such as businesses, religious groups, alumni associations or parent groups to raise money for the accounts of youth in their communities. CalKIDS is a natural home for this initiative, given that nearly five million children already have accounts and the program’s administrative infrastructure can accommodate third-party contributions.

Beyond putting additional dollars into accounts, community contributions show youth that their community believes in them and supports their dreams. This impact is magnified when contributions are tied to a specific person or group, making the support feel tangible and personal. The Community Contributions program will also amplify awareness and engagement. For example, a business donating a portion of its profits to local children’s accounts could promote its efforts with a sign in the store or by seeking media coverage, broadening CalKIDS’ visibility. Additionally, organizations that raise funds for accounts have a vested interest in ensuring families claim them, naturally expanding outreach efforts.

### Implementation

Implementing a Community Contributions program using CalKIDS’ infrastructure will begin with the State Treasurer’s Office requesting that VistaShare Outcome Tracker activate a feature enabling third-party contributions to accounts. Because this feature has been activated before (for the Beyond Covered initiative and a 2023 TIAA promotion), this will be a relatively low lift.

The State Treasurer’s Office will also be responsible for providing the basic communications infrastructure for community campaigns, such as adding the Community Contributions program to CalKIDS’ website, developing clear and engaging materials explaining the benefits of early wealth-building accounts to potential donors and creating a FAQ page to address common inquiries.

The Early Wealth Partnership will oversee a round of small grants to community-based organizations to launch local fundraising campaigns. Grantees will be responsible for recruiting donors, monitoring which communities receive contributions and doing special recruitment to fill in any equity gaps. They will also work to secure media coverage celebrating contributions and attracting future donors.

This strategy will be linked to other parts of the CEWAS Plan. For example, the Communications Toolkit (see page 28), could include sample language to recruit donors to the Community Contributions Program and celebrate their donations. Outreach and Engagement Grants Program applicants (see page 18), would also be encouraged to use their local networks to boost participation in the Community Contributions program. The success of this initiative will also depend on implementing the strategy of opening new CalKIDS accounts where private funding is available to seed them (see page 38). The State Treasurer’s Office’s early conversations with potential donors have revealed strong interest in supporting children’s futures, especially when contributions can benefit entire classrooms, schools or neighborhoods. However, CalKIDS is not yet a universal program for school-aged children, presenting a barrier to fully unlocking philanthropic investment.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Private</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$1.5 million</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer’s Office</li> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>CBOs</li> </ul>	Establish year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Annual dollar amount of community contributions raised
- Number of organizations providing Community Contributions

### Additional Resources

- NYC Kids RISE Save for College’s [Community Scholarships program](#)
- Sample media coverage for a Save for College community scholarship investment: [Koeppel Auto Group launches scholarship program at East Elmhurst school through NYC Kids RISE](#)
- News release: [Covered California Announces Launch of Population Health Investments in Conjunction With Its Quality Transformation Initiative](#)

## SYSTEM FOR NEW CALKIDS ACCOUNTS WITH OUTSIDE FUNDING

### Context

**Current CalKIDS eligibility is universal for newborns but limited to low-income school-aged children.** This limitation creates confusion about who is eligible and frustration among local donors who want to support broader groups — like entire classrooms or neighborhoods — that include ineligible students (see the Community Contributions Program on page 37 for more information). Recent field research reveals frustration among local stakeholders who encounter families eager to participate, only to discover their children are ineligible. Community organizations, donors and civic leaders seek mechanisms to support broader groups of children, including those who:

- Live in mixed-income neighborhoods
- Attend schools with both eligible and ineligible students
- Face acute socioeconomic barriers but don't meet formal eligibility requirements
- Moved to California after the eligibility determination date

CalKIDS should be authorized to open and manage new accounts for children who are not otherwise eligible, using private or other non-state funds raised by local communities to seed those accounts. This shift would leverage local investment, expand access and build account balances.

### Implementation

We propose that the State Treasurer's Office administer this strategy, working closely with the Early Wealth Partnership, local CSA leaders and other community-based advocacy partners. Key activities include:

- **Legislative Authorization:** External partners would collaborate with legislative champions to introduce and advance statutory changes enabling CalKIDS to manage privately funded accounts in alignment with existing program standards.
- **Policy and Technical Development:** Following authorization, the State Treasurer's Office would develop state guidance for new account creation, design secure systems for tracking private contributions and uphold strong fiduciary and transparency practices.
- **Pilot Phase:** A limited rollout would test and refine account setup, private fund administration, outreach and claiming strategies.

- **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:** The State Treasurer's Office and its pilot partners will assess program performance, ensuring data-driven refinements and transparent reporting to all stakeholders.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Public</li> <li>• Estimated 3-year cost: Included in costs associated with the <a href="#">Advocacy and Community Contributions Program</a> proposals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>• CBOs</li> </ul>	Achievable over 2–3 years

### Indicators of Impact

- A target of 25,000 new accounts opened for otherwise ineligible children within three years
- 15% increase in CalKIDS claim rates within pilot communities compared to similar demographics in non-pilot areas, demonstrating the "halo effect" of more universal program access
- 85% of pilot partners report improved ability to serve whole cohorts, reduced administrative burden and decreased family confusion

## SIMPLIFY SET UP OF CALKIDS-LINKED SCHOLARSHARE ACCOUNTS

### Context

**Many families want to put aside savings for their children's futures, but the process of opening a ScholarShare 529 account and linking it to CalKIDS can be daunting, especially for families less familiar with financial products and investments.** ScholarShare 529 already follows some of the 529 field's best practices, such as eschewing minimum contributions and offering relatively low management fees, but there remains room for improvement.

Steps to make ScholarShare 529 more accessible for California families include:

- **Translate the website application form:** The ScholarShare website is available in English and Spanish. Families wishing to complete the application form in Spanish may use a translated PDF form (which they must then print out and mail back), but the web-based form is not translated. Translation of the website and application forms is not available for other languages.
- **Ease the transition between the CalKIDS and ScholarShare 529 websites:** An evaluation of Massachusetts' BabySteps CSA program found that many families were thrown off by the transition from BabySteps' web page to the Fidelity 529 application web page. The two sites had very different appearance, colors and wording, and the Fidelity site did not mention the BabySteps deposit. The abrupt shift created confusion and even caused some families to abandon the application because they were unsure why they were on a new website. There is a similar abrupt transition between CalKIDS' website and the ScholarShare 529 application. Implementers should investigate what additional language or visual cues may reassure families they are on the right track.
- **Invest in support:** Equip partners to help families open 529 accounts through the proposed Train-the-Trainer Program (see page 31), document sample language for explaining 529s in the Communications Toolkit (see page 28), and embed 529 claiming support into the Outreach and Engagement Grants Program (see page 18).
- **Seek out learnings and best practices from elsewhere in the 529 field:** In particular, Maine's NextGen 529 program's recently-introduced "Connect Accounts" may offer ideas and learnings for ScholarShare 529. Connect Accounts are designed to lower barriers to account-opening for families with limited investment experience and those who have concerns about being able to access funds during financial emergencies.

### Implementation

The Treasurer's Office and the CalKIDS team will be responsible for leading implementation of this strategy. They may draw upon the wisdom of their partners — including local CSAs and other outreach partners — to identify the common roadblocks that families encounter when opening 529 accounts and linking them to CalKIDS accounts.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Public</li> <li>• Estimated 3-year cost: No new funding required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>• CBOs</li> </ul>	Achievable over 2–3 years

### Indicators of Impact

- Increase in the number and share of CalKIDS accounts that are linked to family-owned accounts
- California ScholarShare College Savings Plan receives a gold rating in [Morningstar's 529 ratings](#), an independent rating system

### Additional Resources

- [Increasing Access to Postsecondary Education: Savings Strategies for Designing Equitable 529 Programs](#) provides recommendations and examples from the 529 field
- [Evaluation of the Massachusetts BabySteps Program](#) identifies barriers related to 529 applications based on interviews with families and focus groups with BabySteps administrators and partners
- Savings for College's [profile of ScholarShare 529](#)
- NextGen 529 [Connect Accounts](#)

## ENABLE CASH DEPOSITS INTO SCHOLARSHARE 529 ACCOUNTS

### Context

**CalKIDS encourages eligible families to “claim” their accounts and link them to family-owned ScholarShare 529 accounts, allowing them to grow their savings by adding their own deposits.** Families have half a dozen options for contributing to their ScholarShare 529 accounts, but one opportunity remains underdeveloped: enabling cash contributions.

Enabling cash deposits would make participation in CalKIDS and other 529-based programs more accessible for families who do not use traditional banking systems. FDIC data show that 4.2% of California households are unbanked, meaning no one in the household has a checking or savings account at a bank or credit union. Unbanked rates are even higher among Black (10.6%), Hispanic (9.5%) and American Indian/Alaska Native (12.2%) households. These disparities underscore the importance of offering a cash contribution option to enable CalKIDS to reach all California families.

A cash deposit option would also allow CalKIDS to adopt local CSA programs’ highly successful “Deposit Day” events. Pioneered by San Francisco Kindergarten to College and replicated by other local programs, these events typically involve a field trip to a bank, where children learn how to make deposits into their savings accounts. Deposit Day events build awareness and excitement about saving for the future. With a cash deposit option, CalKIDS and its outreach partners could replicate this model at scale.

### Implementation

The State Treasurer’s Office will work with TIAA, ScholarShare 529’s management partner, to map out the technical and policy infrastructure needed to accept cash contributions. This is, to our knowledge, new ground for 529 plans, so innovative problem-solving may be necessary. Funds raised by the Early Wealth Partnership can be used to secure planning and design support from financial technology experts.

One route to explore would be establishing relationships with banks and credit unions that are willing to accept cash deposits from families at their branch locations and electronically transfer them to ScholarShare 529 accounts. These institutions may already have infrastructure for similar services, such as remittances or third-party bill pay, that could be adapted for this purpose.

Another possibility would be partnering with accessible retail outlets, such as 7-Eleven and CVS, to expand cash deposit access for unbanked and underbanked families. Some state 529 plans have partnered with Gift of College to offer 529 gift

cards that can be purchased in-person (including with cash) or online<sup>19</sup> redeemed into 529 accounts. This model offers a proof of concept, although current transaction fees make it less viable for small, frequent contributions.

In addition to expanding cash deposit options, early wealth-building programs can also support broader financial inclusion. Several CSA programs in the country collaborate with their local Bank On coalitions to help unbanked and underbanked families access safe, affordable banking services.

Once the cash deposit option is in place, CalKIDS and other early wealth-building programs should explore replicating the Deposit Day model. This work may be done in tandem with the Outreach and Engagement Grants Program (see page 18), and Early Wealth-Building Accounts Communities of Practice (see page 19). Early piloting of cash deposits and Deposit Days will target areas with relatively high unbanked and underbanked rates.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Private</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$200,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer’s Office</li> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>CBO(s) or Vendors</li> </ul>	Achievable over 2–3 years

### Indicators of Impact

- Increased rates in linking CalKIDS accounts to family-owned 529 accounts in pilot areas
- Number of cash deposits and total value of deposits
- Number of Deposit Day events held

### Additional Resources

- [Managing your ScholarShare 529 account](#)
- [2023 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households](#) offers interactive charts provide data on banking access in California
- [SF program sets up college savings accounts for kindergartners](#): ABC reporters join San Francisco K2C Deposit Day field trip
- [MEFA Announces a Gift Card to Help Pay for College, Give the Gift That Lasts a Lifetime, Invest529 Gift Cards Now Available at CVS Locations](#): Gift cards redeemable for 529 plans or ABLE accounts are now available at CVS stores in states including Massachusetts, Maine and Virginia

## BUILD AND MAINTAIN STATE FUNDING FOR CALKIDS AND HOPE ACCOUNTS

### Context

**The state of California has invested nearly \$2.2 billion over the past four years to fund early wealth-building accounts for more than five million children.** State funds provide the initial investment into each newborn's and low-income student's CalKIDS account, as well additional contributions for children in foster care and those who are homeless. Allocations from the state's budget also provide the corpus of the HOPE Child Trust Fund (HOPE Fund), from which young adults who've experienced an extended period in foster care or are low-income and have lost a parent to COVID will receive resources at age 18.

As the population of children eligible for these critical resources grows each year, new CalKIDS accounts and a larger HOPE Fund are needed to extend these opportunities to new children. CalKIDS and HOPE are not mandated programs in the state budget. They are General Fund line items that are reviewed and voted on each year as part of the state's budgeting process. Inevitably, this creates an element of uncertainty about state funding. Consequently, successful implementation, broad support from the voting public and strategic advocacy are all critical to sustaining these powerful early wealth-building opportunities.

To achieve the vision of HOPE's authorizing legislation — to open a publicly funded trust account for all low-income children in the state — will require a multi-year advocacy campaign and a large-scale, dedicated source of investment funds. As the HOPE program is fully implemented, its early impacts combined with a policy strategy will be activated to achieve this goal.

### Implementation

Advocating for ongoing state funding for CalKIDS and HOPE accounts — and for their implementation — will be an important focus of the proposed CEWAS Advocacy Grants program (see page 20). More broadly, sustained support for these programs requires ensuring that eligible children and their families know about, claim and actively use their accounts. Building program engagement strengthens the constituency behind early wealth-building programs and reinforces the case for continued funding. Documenting the positive impacts of these programs on the well-being, education and economic mobility of children over time also is critical. Finally, successfully aligning systems and implementing program improvements, as outlined in the CEWAS Plan, will be key to long-term impact and sustainability.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Public</li> <li>• Estimated cost: Maintenance of effort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>• CBOs</li> <li>• CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish year 1 and ongoing</li> </ul>

### Indicators of Impact

- Sufficient funding to provide all eligible children with a CalKIDS and HOPE account at a level envisioned in each program's authorizing legislation

## IMPROVE LOCAL CONTROL FUNDING FORMULA (LCFF) DATA

### Context

**CalKIDS eligibility is determined using identifying data provided by the California Department of Education (CDE) to the California State Treasurer’s Office.** However, because CDE has incomplete data — particularly on income and other eligibility indicators — some potentially eligible students are not identified.

Eligibility for CalKIDS funding is based on enrollment in a California public school and membership in one or more “high-need” categories under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). In the first year of implementation, eligibility was determined using student status on Census Day (the first Wednesday in October) of the 2021–22 school year for grades 1–12. Beginning in 2022–23, new accounts are created only for first graders on Census Day.

High-need categories qualifying students for CalKIDS include:

- Low-income (socioeconomic disadvantage)
- English learner
- Migrant
- Homeless
- Foster youth

Each year, CDE determines eligibility and shares a file of eligible students with the State Treasurer’s Office under a CalKIDS data-sharing agreement.

A primary source of eligibility information is the application for free or reduced-price meals, which parents/guardians complete at the start of the school year. This form collects household income and participation in benefit programs such as CalWORKS, CalFresh or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). Participation in these programs qualifies students for meal benefits without requiring detailed income reporting. The application may also include parent-reported information on a student’s homeless, migrant or foster care status. School districts submit this information to CDE.

However, not all families return the meal application, especially since California implemented universal free school meals in 2022–23. Moreover, many school administrators and families may be unaware that this form is used to determine CalKIDS eligibility.

Unlike other eligibility criteria, English learner status is determined through the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC). Students who do not demonstrate proficiency on the Initial ELPAC are classified as English Learners and may qualify for CalKIDS if this classification is in place on Census Day of first grade. However, English Learner status often changes over time. Variation in the timing or accuracy of reclassification reporting could affect CalKIDS eligibility.

### Implementation

Since CalKIDS eligibility relies on CDE-held data, ensuring data completeness and accuracy is critical. We propose that the State Treasurer’s Office and the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA partner with CDE and other relevant agencies to conduct a study to:

- Identify how many students are missing eligibility-related data, and
- Estimate the annual cost of serving these students if complete data were available.

The study will use multi-year student data to track CalKIDS-qualifying characteristics across time, identifying students whose eligibility was missed in first grade but documented in kindergarten or second grade. Based on the findings, the State Treasurer’s Office will seek increased state funding to ensure all eligible students can be served.

To improve data completeness going forward, the State Treasurer’s Office and the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA will create and distribute informational materials for elementary principals, school staff and families. These materials will explain how responses on the meal application affect CalKIDS eligibility and encourage schools to communicate this clearly to families of first graders.

Additionally, the State Treasurer’s Office and the CalKIDS Institute will collaborate with other state agencies to identify alternative data sources that could be used to determine eligibility when meal applications are not returned.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Source: Public</li><li>• Estimated cost: Included in core funding of CalKIDS Institute</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li><li>• State Treasurer’s Office</li></ul>	Achievable over 2–3 years

### **Indicators of Impact**

- Awareness among elementary staff and families about the meal application's role in determining CalKIDS eligibility
- Completion rates for free or reduced-price meal application, especially for first grade students
- Number of students newly identified as eligible for CalKIDS through the research
- Number of new CalKIDS accounts created as a result of the research findings

### **Additional Resources**

- [Local Control Funding Formula FAQ](#)
- [Universal Meals Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [School Nutrition Programs Eligibility](#)
- [English Language Proficiency Assessment for California \(ELPAC\)](#)
- [Reclassification of English Learners](#)

## PUBLISH AGGREGATE CALKIDS AND HOPE DATA BY SCHOOL AND DISTRICT

### Context

**In 2025, the State Treasurer’s Office and the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA began collaborating on CalKIDS claiming data analysis.** The CalKIDS Institute provided templates to support the generation of dashboard-ready tables and figures, including county-level data on accounts created and claimed, as well as disbursement data by post-secondary institution within California’s higher education system (i.e., California Community Colleges, California State Universities and University of California schools). Such summaries are shared in presentations to the ScholarShare Investment Board, with statewide partners such as the California CSA Coalition, with community groups upon request and in annual program reports.

While these high-level summaries offer insight into program implementation and overall progress, they have limited utility for TK–12 school and district staff — those in direct, daily contact with CalKIDS-eligible (and eventually HOPE-eligible) students and families.

To strengthen CalKIDS promotion within TK–12 settings, school and district staff need timely, accessible data about the number of students with accounts and how many have been claimed. Regular access to this information would not only raise awareness but also allow staff to track the impact of their outreach efforts over time.

This approach has been successfully demonstrated by the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE). Through its Assessment, Accountability & Continuous Improvement unit, RCOE publishes a CalKIDS dashboard featuring “scorecards” with data on the number of students with CalKIDS accounts, estimated account values and claim status. The data are available at the school, district and county levels and are updated regularly on the RCOE Superintendent’s Financial Literacy Initiative homepage. RCOE has been successful in creating broad enthusiasm for CalKIDS engagement and even a measure of constructive competitiveness among schools through the strategic use of student participation data (see RCOE Case Study on page 12).

### Implementation

We propose a more nuanced analysis of CalKIDS (and eventually HOPE) participant data disaggregated by grade level, primary language and CalKIDS eligibility criteria — including income, English learner designation, housing status, migrant status and foster care status. To protect student privacy, subgroup data would only be reported at the state, county and district levels, with suppression of counts based on fewer than 20 students.

To be most effective, the data should be posted online to a central CalKIDS and HOPE account participation dashboard that can be easily accessed by schools, districts and community partners. The CEWAS Plan strategy related to data sharing via the California Cradle to Career Data System and the California Student Aid Commission can also support this project. The CalKIDS Institute will also communicate directly with district and school administrators to raise awareness of the dashboard and gather feedback on its usefulness.

Ongoing, public reporting of CalKIDS account and claim data will significantly enhance program engagement in TK–12 settings. Reporting by subgroup will help stakeholders assess who is being reached through current efforts and refine strategies to increase engagement.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Public</li> <li>Estimated cost: Use existing resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer’s Office</li> <li>CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> </ul>	Establish year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Number of visits to statewide CalKIDS and HOPE dashboard
- Number of county, district and school websites linking to the statewide dashboard
- Frequency of dashboard updates

### Additional Resources

- [CalKIDS Impact Report: July 1, 2022–June 30, 2024](#)
- [Riverside County Office of Education CalKIDS Dashboard](#)
- [Riverside County Office of Education CalKIDS Scorecards](#)

## C2C DATA SYSTEM AND CSAC AS VEHICLES FOR DATA SHARING

### Context

**As the public agency implementing CalKIDS and HOPE, the state Treasurer’s Office identifies the children and youth eligible for these opportunities.** Eligibility data and contact information comes from multiple sources. The State Treasurer’s Office uses birth certificate data provided by the California Department of Public Health to create CalKIDS accounts for newborns; and it uses data from the California Department of Education to create CalKIDS accounts and identify students in foster care or who are unhoused that are eligible for additional deposits. HOPE eligible young people will be identified through a combination of data sources provided by the California Department of Social Services and California Department of Public Health.

While this flow of information to the State Treasurer’s Office supports the process of identifying eligible children, outreach efforts are limited by the fact that CBOs, local CSA programs and school systems — who have ongoing contact with CalKIDS- and HOPE-eligible children and their families — generally do not have access to detailed information about these accounts. Information about CalKIDS and HOPE account status (in particular, who has an account and whether the account has been claimed) is not currently shared with state agencies, nor is it generally accessible to local partners.

There is a notable exception. The Riverside County Office of Education and its constituent districts have (though a change in the California Education Code) established data sharing agreements with the state that allow the State Treasurer’s Office to share CalKIDS account information for students enrolled in the county’s public schools (see Case Study on page 12).

Efforts are now underway to integrate CalKIDS account information into the statewide Cradle-to-Career Data System (C2C Data System). The C2C Data System provides data-informed tools to help students reach their college and career goals and delivers information on education and workforce outcomes. The system includes resources focused on early learning through TK–12 and higher education, as well as on the financial aid and social services that help students reach their goals.

In February 2025, the C2C Data System Governing Board approved the ScholarShare Investment Board (the unit within the State Treasurer’s Office that administers CalKIDS) as a C2C data provider and approved the inclusion of specific data points related to CalKIDS accounts, including the amount in the account and whether or not the account has been claimed.

### Implementation

The inclusion of these data into the C2C Data System will create new opportunities for research and aggregate reporting. The centralization of account data with other student information also has the potential to enhance local outreach efforts. This was noted by C2C Data System Advisory Board member Diana Phong, who advocated for inclusion of CalKIDS accounts in C2C in a 2024 proposal to the Governing Board: “This information can help inform the utilization of CalKIDS, support more targeted outreach across the state in areas where there is low utilization and ensure equitable access to and benefit from the program” (see page 9).

The C2C Data System is still in its earliest phases of roll-out (the first dashboard tools were launched in April 2025). And the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) is just beginning to explore integrating CalKIDS participation information in the WebGrants platform (which includes tools for both students and administrators) and/or California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP).

The State Treasurer’s Office is leading this data integration work with support from the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA. When these new tools are created the CalKIDS Institute proposes to develop trainings for TK–12 and higher education partners about how to utilize the C2C Data System and CSAC resources to promote awareness of and improve access to CalKIDS and HOPE accounts.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Public</li> <li>Estimated cost: Existing staff in the State Treasurer’s Office and CalKIDS Institute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer’s Office</li> <li>CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> </ul>	Establish year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Number of CalKIDS TK–12 and higher education partners participating in trainings about C2C and CSAC
- Number of partners using C2C and CSAC to obtain information about CalKIDS accounts
- Increasing numbers of students and administrators accessing information about CalKIDS and HOPE

### Additional Resources

- [California Cradle-to-Career Data System \(C2C\)](#)
- [California Cradle-to-Career Data System Advisory Board Proposal: Track Child Accounts Data](#): Proposal submitted by Advisory Board member Diana Phuong
- [California Cradle-to-Career Data Governing Board February 28, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
- [California Student Opportunity and Access Program \(Cal-SOAP\)](#)
- [EdSource: California launches first phase of long-anticipated Cradle-to-Career data system](#): April 2025 article describing roll-out of the C2C Student Pathways Dashboard)
- [CTO/SIB: Cradle-to-Career Data Points](#)

## USE LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA FOR OUTREACH

### Context

For CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs that establish accounts for school-age children (as opposed to infants), student data from the California Department of Education (CDE) or local school districts is used to set up and fund accounts. This includes each student’s Statewide Student Identifier (SSID)—a unique number assigned to every TK–12 student in California’s public school system. The SSID is used to track students and link them to academic records such as assessment scores and grades. It also serves as a key identifier for creating and claiming a student’s CalKIDS account online.

Under the current data-sharing agreement between the State Treasurer’s Office and CDE, the State Treasurer’s Office is not permitted to share lists of students with CalKIDS accounts back to school districts. However, districts can still use the data they already have to identify students likely to have CalKIDS, HOPE or local CSA accounts and carry out targeted outreach. To support this, districts should be provided with clear guidance on how to analyze and apply their existing data effectively.

In addition, school districts can strengthen partnerships with community-based organizations working to promote CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA programs by helping families and students access their SSID—an essential requirement for claiming CalKIDS accounts online.

Local districts are well positioned to play a central role in promoting these early wealth-building programs. They typically have more up-to-date and complete contact information than what is available to the State Treasurer’s Office, are familiar with families’ preferred communication methods (e.g., phone, text, email, mail) and are trusted sources within their communities. Because schools often have established relationships with families by first grade, messages from districts are more likely to be noticed and acted upon. These advantages can significantly boost participation by ensuring families understand and access the early wealth-building opportunities available to their children.

### Implementation

To support district engagement, the CalKIDS Institute at UCLA will work with the State Treasurer’s Office to develop a user guide for district staff. The guide will help staff:

- Understand CalKIDS and HOPE eligibility criteria (and local CSA programs, where available)
- Use local data to identify likely eligible students who may already have accounts
- Access templates for family communications
- Plan outreach timing for maximum impact

The CalKIDS Institute will also provide ongoing support through webinars and direct technical assistance.

While future changes in data-sharing practices may allow the State Treasurer’s Office to share full student lists with districts, local efforts need not wait. A recent change to the California Education Code now permits the State Treasurer’s Office to share student-level CalKIDS data with the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) and local districts. Even before this authorization, RCOE used its own data to help districts identify likely eligible students—a model that can be replicated statewide.

Importantly, district-led outreach is not meant to replace the State Treasurer’s Office’s or local CSA program’s direct communications, but to complement them. Messages from trusted school sources can reinforce state-level outreach, increasing the likelihood that families will understand and claim their children’s accounts. Empowering school districts to use their data for targeted outreach is a critical step toward expanding CalKIDS awareness and participation statewide.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Public</li> <li>• Estimated cost: Included in core funding of CalKIDS Institute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Treasurer’s Office</li> <li>• CalKIDS Institute at UCLA</li> </ul>	Establish year 1 and ongoing

### Indicators of Impact

- Materials developed to help local districts to identify their CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA eligible students
- Number and nature of technical assistance interactions between district staff and the CalKIDS Institute to identify eligible students
- Number of local districts using their own data to identify eligible students
- Numbers of families who report hearing about CalKIDS, HOPE or a local CSA program from their child's school

### Additional Resources

- [Advancing CalKIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation's Largest College Savings Account Program](#): Trusted messengers matter
- [Riverside County Office of Education Helps Students Claim Free College Savings Account](#)

## ENHANCE NAVIGATION AND VISIBILITY ACROSS ALL EARLY WEALTH-BUILDING PROGRAMS

### Context

California's early wealth-building programs operate through separate websites and portals, including CalKIDS, local CSA programs and the forthcoming HOPE program. As a result, families often navigate a fragmented system. A child may have multiple early wealth-building accounts, but parents and youth must find each of them.

Currently, there is no standardized user experience or consistent way to discover related programs from a single entry point. For example, while CalKIDS links to California's ScholarShare 529 college savings plan, it does not offer an intuitive path to other CSAs or HOPE. We propose a "no wrong door" approach, ensuring families can access all related programs from any starting point via a standardized view of relevant web links.

This strategy builds on best practices in user experience for public programs, findings from the CEWAS research team's technology and infrastructure assessment and recent interviews with local CSA program staff. It recommends that CalKIDS, HOPE and all 15 local CSA programs include a simple, consistent section — or "web module" — with direct links to all the other early wealth-building programs. When these links are placed in a familiar spot across all websites, program participants will have an easy way to discover and access every program for which they may be eligible.

### Implementation

We propose implementing this strategy in three phases: In the **Design phase**, CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA program leaders will align on a standard, user-friendly module that links families to all early wealth-building programs. This includes agreeing on core content and layout and ensuring the module reflects input from families.

During the **Integration phase**, each program will embed the shared module on its website. The goal is to ensure that regardless of where a family starts — whether with CalKIDS, a local CSA or HOPE — they can easily find and access all other relevant accounts.

Finally, in the **Launch and Learning phase**, the module will go live and be monitored for reach and usability. Web traffic and user feedback will help inform future enhancements, laying the groundwork for a more connected, intuitive statewide system that reduces confusion and increases family engagement across early wealth-building programs. Implementation of this strategy can be largely accomplished by the existing staff in the State Treasurer's Office and local CSA programs. New funding will be identified for technology and project management as needed.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Private</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$50,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>Local CSA programs</li> </ul>	Achievable within 12 months

### Indicators of Impact

- All participating program websites display the standardized section within the first year, with full rollout verified through web audits and implementation logs
- Achieve at least a 50% increase in referral traffic between linked sites, measured by web analytics
- Positive feedback from user surveys on awareness and navigation, along with a reduction in support requests related to finding information across programs

### Additional Resources

- [U.S. Web Design System \(USWDS\)](#): Guidance to ensure websites are accessible, consistent and easy to navigate across all programs
- [PlainLanguage.gov Guidelines](#): Helps make information clear and easy for all families to understand and act on
- [How to Apply the No Wrong Door Framework to Government Service Delivery](#): Guides the design so families can access a program from any entry point

# PLAN FOR ACHIEVING A SINGLE, ONLINE ACCESS POINT

## Context

As noted in the [Enhanced Visibility strategy](#), California youth and families must currently navigate separate technology systems to claim, view or request disbursements from their CalKIDS account, local CSA (if enrolled in one of 15 local programs) and their forthcoming HOPE account. The absence of a unified access point or shared online platform creates multiple hurdles for young people and their families trying to access these funds.

For example, a foster-involved high school senior in Oakland may be eligible for a \$1,000 CalKIDS account, an Oakland Promise scholarship of up to \$4,000 and — by the end of 2025 — a HOPE account with a target value of \$4,500. To access these funds, the student must first become aware of each opportunity and then complete three separate online registration and disbursement processes.

Although there is strong interest in integrating access to all of California’s early wealth-building accounts through a single online portal, the challenges are significant. CalKIDS and HOPE, while both state-run programs administered by the State Treasurer’s Office, are governed by different legislation and operational requirements. Local CSA programs were established independently — many before CalKIDS — and operate under diverse legal, financial and administrative frameworks. These differences, along with varying privacy agreements and account structures, make developing a unified access system complex and legally challenging.

## Implementation

CEWAS leadership and its community partners recognize the importance of a single access point but do not yet have a clear roadmap to achieve it. As a result, the CEWAS Plan proposes forming a planning committee and investing in technical support during Year 2 and 3 of implementation to explore the feasibility, design and necessary partnerships for this strategy.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Public</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$250,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer’s Office</li> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>CBOs</li> </ul>	Achievable over 2–3 years

## Indicators of Impact

- A single online portal through which young people can find, claim, view and request disbursements for multiple early wealth-building accounts

## EXPLORE MIGRATING LOCAL CSA ACCOUNTS ONTO THE CALKIDS PLATFORM

### Context

**California is home to the largest statewide CSA program in the nation — CalKIDS — alongside fifteen locally operated CSA programs that predate CalKIDS.**

With CalKIDS now fully operational, some local CSA programs are interested in exploring the option of transitioning their locally funded and created accounts for children onto the CalKIDS banking and operating platform. They see potential efficiencies in not having to maintain and manage a local account infrastructure. At the same time, transitioning to a new system can be daunting, particularly for smaller or community-based programs that lack dedicated technical staff, flexible funding or the capacity to manage data migrations and retrain personnel. As one program leader explained, “We know our current system has limitations, but the prospect of migrating years of account data and retraining staff feels overwhelming without dedicated support.”

Identifying the incentives, technical supports and feature customizations that would encourage local programs to adopt a shared backend through CalKIDS — instead of maintaining standalone systems — could significantly improve the participant experience. This approach would reduce administrative burden on local staff and enable a more unified, scalable system statewide.

Creating clear and well-supported pathways for interested programs to integrate with CalKIDS, while preserving their ability to engage families locally, presents a significant opportunity to align systems, reduce redundancy, centralize technical support skills and improve the user experience.

### Implementation

This strategy proposes a structured process to position CalKIDS as a strong platform option for local CSA programs. It would identify interested programs, assess platform needs and CalKIDS’ capabilities, develop tailored migration plans and provide technical assistance to support smooth, voluntary transitions. A first step is to establish a technical working group of local CSA leaders, CalKIDS representatives and platform experts. The working group will define essential features, address system gaps and map integration pathways. It will also explore flexible options, including hardship withdrawals and community-specific branding.

The working group will identify and support one or two local CSA programs to pilot the process of migrating accounts, documenting the processes and its outcomes.

Funding raised by the Early Wealth Partnership would support technical consultants, local CSA staff time and program migration assistance. The State Treasurer’s Office would convene the working group, coordinate assessments with ScholarShare and oversee pilots and evaluations.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Private</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$150,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer’s Office</li> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>Local CSA programs</li> </ul>	Achievable over 2–3 years

### Indicators of Impact

- The number of local CSA programs completing an assessment of the merits of migrating their accounts to CalKIDS
- The number of local CSA programs successfully migrating their accounts to CalKIDS
- Reduction in the administrative burden for local program staff and/or improved family access post-account migration
- Creation of a comprehensive migration toolkit

### Additional Resources

- [CalKIDS Program Overview](#): Current structure of CalKIDS accounts, registration and linking to ScholarShare 529 and restrictions
- [CalKids Impact Report July 1, 2022–June 30, 2024](#): Identifies technical and operational insights critical for informing local CSA migration strategies
- [Zen and the Art of Information Management — Prosperity Now, 2019](#): Guidance on building accessible, accurate and community-centered data systems

## IMPROVE MOBILE RESPONSIVENESS ACROSS ALL PLATFORMS

### Context

**California's early wealth-building programs serve diverse families across the state, many of whom primarily access the internet via mobile devices.** However, the user experience across these platforms remains uneven, with limited mobile optimization leading to navigation challenges and difficulties completing key tasks such as document uploads and account claiming.

Navigation difficulties, unresponsive forms and complicated data entry on smartphones continue to limit access — especially for families using older devices or limited data plans. Interviews with staff from local CSA programs, including Oakland Promise, San Francisco K2C and Semillitas, confirm that many families using mobile devices have difficulty completing even basic actions, such as submitting forms or uploading documents.

This strategy addresses these barriers by improving mobile responsiveness across all early wealth-building programs. The goal is to ensure that parents and caregivers can easily access and interact with CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA portals on any device, with particular emphasis on simplified mobile layouts and streamlined data entry processes.

### Implementation

We propose a coordinated effort to improve the mobile experience across CalKIDS, HOPE and local CSA digital interfaces. This includes a comprehensive assessment and targeted redesigns to ensure functionality on smartphones and tablets.

The first step is a usability audit focused on mobile performance across current platforms (including VistaShare and CalKIDS portals). The audit will document layout, navigation and data-entry friction points, especially in claiming accounts, linking 529s and uploading documentation.

Based on the audit findings, technical teams will make improvements to the front-end of each platform to ensure they work well on smartphones and tablets. These improvements will include adjusting layouts to fit smaller screens, simplifying forms and making data entry fields easier to use on mobile devices. Where possible, teams will also streamline the information requested or display only the most essential fields on small screens to make the process faster and more accessible for users.

Platforms with heavy mobile use will be prioritized for early changes. Where feasible, updates will adhere to mobile accessibility standards from the U.S. Web Design System (USWDS). Local CSA programs can serve as test sites to collect user feedback and refine the mobile user experience iteratively. Testing will emphasize inclusive design principles for families with limited digital literacy or language barriers.

Philanthropic resources raised by the Early Wealth Partnership can support the planning and technology services required to implement these changes systemwide.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Private</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$200,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>Local CSA programs</li> </ul>	Achievable within 12 months

### Indicators of Impact

- All platforms receiving improvements successfully pass mobile responsiveness audits (e.g., Google Lighthouse, accessibility standards)
- Increased use of mobile devices for account claiming and engagement (tracked via analytics)
- Positive user feedback from families accessing accounts via smartphones or tablets
- Reduction in support tickets related to mobile access issues

### Additional Resources

- [U.S. Web Design System \(USWDS\)](#): Guidance to ensure websites are accessible, consistent and easy to navigate across all programs
- [PlainLanguage.gov Guidelines](#): Helps make information clear and easy for all families to understand and act on
- [Zen and the Art of Information Management](#): Guidance from Prosperity Now on effective data use to strengthen CSA program management and outreach
- [Seeds of Equity: Fostering Inclusivity in Children's Saving Account Programs](#): Recommends strategies to build more inclusive and equitable CSA programs

## OPTIMIZE THE TEXT MESSAGING PLATFORM EMBEDDED IN CALKIDS AND SOME LOCAL CSA PROGRAMS

### Context

VistaShare's Outcome Tracker is one of the most widely used information systems in the CSA field, with 36% of CSA programs nationwide utilizing it to manage program information, according to [Prosperity Now's survey](#).

However, Outcome Tracker's messaging limitations — such as a lack of two-way texting, multilingual support and automation — hinder effective engagement.

Text messaging is a highly effective outreach tool: Semillitas, for example, saw engagement rates more than double, from 5% to 12%, after incorporating texting into their communications. [Oakland Promise Brilliant Baby](#) uses text messaging to announce its workshops and events, for scheduling, for parents to submit requests for assistance and even to share personalized links to sign up for a Brilliant Baby CSA.

Other initiatives, such as the CalkIDS/CDSS campaign (see page 16), and San Francisco's K2C program (see page 13), have also demonstrated the power of texting to boost participation. However, many programs currently rely on third-party platforms, such as Modern Campus, for texting, which increases costs and complicates communication workflows. Enhancing Outcome Tracker's native texting capabilities is therefore a strategic priority.

The current limitations of Outcome Tracker's messaging capabilities include:

- Lack of two-way texting capabilities
- Multilingual messaging requires manual workarounds: Outcome Tracker does not currently support message templating in multiple languages or language preference tagging for participants
- The mobile interface is challenging to navigate, with poor layout, small text fields and forms that are not optimized for smartphones
- Absence of automated messaging workflows
- Limited metrics and analytics for message effectiveness

### Implementation

Improving the capacity of Outcome Tracker's messaging system and the training materials that enable CSA staff to use it effectively will significantly improve outreach and engagement. Work can begin with a cross-program needs assessment to identify system limitations and analyze successful texting strategies from the field.

Informed by that data, Outcome Tracker could be enhanced with two-way multilingual SMS, automated workflows, personalized messaging and robust analytics. A pilot with 3–5 diverse programs will test these features and generate feedback. Scalable training tools, a "Train-the-Trainer" model and a phased statewide rollout will ensure long-term impact and adoption. The Early Wealth Partnership can use philanthropic funds to support costs associated with implementation.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source: Private</li> <li>• Estimated 3-year cost: \$100,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>• Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>• CBOs</li> <li>• Vendor</li> </ul>	Achievable within 12 months

### Indicators of Impact

- Increased CalkIDS account claiming in pilot districts within 12 months
- Outcome Tracker gains multilingual, two-way SMS, automated workflows and analytics dashboards by the end of year 1
- 90% of CSA programs using Outcome Tracker participate in training; 75% adopt enhanced texting tools

### Additional Resources

- [Advancing CalkIDS: Findings and Recommendations for the Nation's Largest College Savings Account Program](#): Identifies outreach improvements to boost engagement, including texting strategies
- [Boston Saves Evaluation: Year 1 Early Outcomes from the Parent/Guardian Survey](#): Shows the impact of communication methods on CSA parent engagement

## ALLOW PHONE NUMBERS TO BE USED FOR SIGN-IN VERIFICATION

### Context

**CalKIDS and local CSA initiatives rely heavily on email for account access and identity verification. However, many low-income and limited-English-speaking families either lack email accounts or struggle to use them regularly.** Mobile phones are often their primary or only means of internet access. Local CSA programs report that this reliance on email creates barriers to both access and ongoing engagement.

Local CSA staff frequently assist families in setting up email accounts, which are required to use both local CSA and CalKIDS parent portals. Staff across programs observed that families are generally more comfortable accessing accounts via mobile devices using phone number-based sign-ins, which are more intuitive and accessible than email and desktop systems.

As one Oakland Promise staff member put it, for under-banked or unbanked families, the current system can feel like being asked to go from “0 to 100, [learning] how to navigate the platform and what the buttons do.” Combined with low digital literacy and poor mobile optimization, these challenges make it difficult for families — especially those who stand to benefit most—to claim and use their accounts.

### Implementation

This strategy addresses the email barrier by allowing families who have already claimed an account to verify their identity using a one-time passcode (OTP) sent to their mobile phone. This will be accomplished by adding a mobile phone number verification option to existing early wealth-building platforms. This mobile-friendly verification method would be a secondary option to the existing email-based login process. It will expand secure access for families whose primary or only device is a mobile phone.

This implementation will start with a pilot phase. Local CSA programs, such as those using platforms like VistaShare, which already collect phone numbers, will partner with vendors to test login changes, gauge user satisfaction and track login success. Feedback from this phase will guide any scaling to CalKIDS and HOPE platforms.

The technical vendors will be responsible for updating user workflows, ensuring compliance with data privacy regulations (such as TCPA and CCPA) and developing security protocols to validate phone numbers. The Early Wealth Partnership will provide grants as needed to coordinate stakeholders, secure vendors and support a family-centered testing and feedback process.

New funding required	Leadership	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Source: Private</li> <li>Estimated 3-year cost: \$100,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Treasurer's Office</li> <li>Early Wealth Partnership</li> <li>CBOs</li> </ul>	Achievable within 12 months

### Indicators of Impact

- At least three early wealth-building programs implement a one time passcode login in the pilot year
- 25% reduction in login-related help requests in pilot communities
- 80% of surveyed pilot users say phone login is easier than email
- Pilot results shape a rollout recommendation to CalKIDS by the end of Year 2

### Additional Resources

- [Building Assets and Aspirations, A Playbook for Integrating Statewide College Promise \(CP\) and Children's Savings Accounts](#), College Promise, July 2023
- [Zen and the Art of Information Management](#), Prosperity Now, June 2019
- [Seeds of Equity: Fostering Inclusivity in Children's Saving Account Programs](#), by Madeline Smith-Gibbs and Rebecca Loya, Brandeis University, January 2022

## THANK YOU

The California Early Wealth Accounts System (CEWAS) Plan was made possible through a generous grant from The BlackRock Foundation.

We are deeply grateful to the many individuals and organizations who helped develop this plan through vital contributions of their time, experience, wisdom and creative thinking. Special appreciation to leaders of the California Child Savings Account Coalition and the CEWAS Steering Committee:

- **Amanda Feinstein**, Director, California CSA Coalition (CEWAS Project Lead)
- **Stephanie Tom**, Deputy State Treasurer
- **Cassandra DiBenedetto**, Executive Director, ScholarShare Investment Board and CalKIDS
- **Kasey O'Connor**, Executive Director, HOPE Children Trust Account program
- **Nayiri Nahabedian**, Executive Director, CalKIDS Institute at UCLA
- **Rebecca Loya**, Research Director, San Francisco Office of the Treasurer and Tax Collector and Co-Chair, California Child Savings Account Coalition
- **Shimica Gaskins**, President and CEO, GRACE
- **Yesenia Jimenez**, Senior Policy Associate, GRACE
- **Patrice Berry**, Policy Director, End Poverty in California (EPIC)

## PLAN WRITERS

- **Amanda Feinstein**, Director, California Child Savings Account Coalition
- **Madeline Smith-Gibbs**, Consultant
- **Susan Mernit**, Consultant
- **Dr. Mark Hansen**, Faculty Advisor, CalKIDS Institute at UCLA

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*Below: Oakland Promise scholarship recipients celebrating at the 2024 Awards Ceremony.*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Appreciation to all who contributed to this report:

- **Ago Eulmessekian**, Glendale Unified School District
- **Amelia Josephson**, Deputy Director, NYC Kids RISE
- **Andrea Luquette**, Principal, Pa'Lante Collaborative Strategies
- **Bob Friedman**, Board Chair, SFF Board of Trustees and Founder and Chair Emeritus, Prosperity Now
- **Catalina Cifuentes**, Executive Director, College Career Readiness, Educational Services Division, Riverside County Office of Education
- **Colleen Quint**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Alford Scholarship Foundation
- **Crystal Gonzalez**, Semillitas Program Director, Ventures
- **Daryl Meyers**, Owner, VistaShare
- **Dave Smucker**, Owner, VistaShare
- **Diane Lim**, Data Analyst, Children's Savings Accounts Initiatives, ScholarShare Investment Board, State Treasurer's Office
- **Ed Khashadourian**, Executive Director, Opportunity to Assets
- **Fiona Ma**, State Treasurer, California
- **Heather Miller**, Deputy Director, NCCPC
- **Humphrey Manacsa**, Outreach Data Specialist, ScholarShare Investment Board, State Treasurer's Office
- **Jessica Petrass**, Director of Education, John Burton Advocates for Youth
- **Jocelyn Kelleher**, Director, Oakland Promise Brilliant Baby Program
- **John Hogan**, Community Projects Manager, Excite Credit Union
- **Joshua Alcocer**, Director, Oakland Promise TK–12 Programs
- **Justine Jimenez**, Manager, West Sacramento Home Run
- **Justher Gutierrez**, Program Coordinator, NCCPC
- **LaWanda Wesley**, Director of Government Relations, Child Care Resource Center
- **Libby Schaaf**, Senior Fellow, Harvard Graduate School of Education and former Mayor, Oakland, California
- **Linda English**, Senior Director, Relationship Management TIAA — Tuition Financing Inc.
- **Maddi Brumbaugh**, Intern/Data Analyst, NCCPC
- **Maria Cadenas**, Executive Director, Ventures
- **Mary Bost**, Acting Maternal, Child and Adolescent Assistant Division Director, California Department of Public Health
- **Matt Lee**, Consultant, Education Savings, TIAA
- **Meredith Curry Nuñez**, Executive Director, NCCPC
- **Mohan Kanungo**, Program Manager, Kindergarten to College, San Francisco Office of Financial Empowerment
- **Monica Soni**, Chief Medical Officer, Covered California
- **Nick Chitwood**, Administrator, Assessment, Accountability and Continuous Improvement, Educational Services Division, Riverside County Office of Education
- **Nik Howard**, Executive Director, Reinvest Stockton Foundation and Co-Chair California Child Savings Account Coalition
- **Noah Lightman**, Children's Savings Accounts Initiatives Manager, ScholarShare Investment Board, State Treasurer's Office
- **Rebeckah Aguirre**, Program Manager, HOPE Children Trust Account program
- **Romeo Amian**, Acting Deputy Director, State Registrar
- **Sandra Uribe**, Program Manager, First Five Futures
- **Sonnie Martinez-Ibarra**, Opportunity LA Program Coordinator
- **Sydney Armendariz**, Director, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Division, California Department of Public Health
- **Tanja Ramming**, Director, Advancing Modoc Youth
- **Tony Amezcua**, Director of Bright Futures Educational Partnership, Hartnell College Foundation
- **Tony Gladney**, CSA Program Director, San Joaquin A+
- **Veena Pawloski**, Chief Program Officer, Oakland Promise



## LOCAL CHILD SAVINGS ACCOUNT PROGRAMS IN CALIFORNIA

California has 15 locally-operated Child Savings Account programs. As of September 2025, these locally operated CSA programs are providing 200,000 children and youth with over \$30 million invested for their college futures. To learn about any of these organizations and the communities they serve, please explore their websites via the links below:

- [Advancing Modoc Youth — Child Savings Account Program](#)
- [Aspires Boys & Girls Club of San Jose](#)
- [College In My Future, Excite Foundation](#)
- [Step Up Savings, Excite Credit Union](#)
- [El Monte Promise Foundation Scholars Savings Program](#)
- [First 5 Futures, Sonoma County First Five's Child Savings Account Program](#)
- [Glendale Unified School District, College Success Fund](#)
- [Oakland Promise Kindergarten to College](#)
- [Oakland Promise Brilliant Baby](#)
- [Opportunity LA](#)
- [San Francisco Kindergarten to College](#)
- [San Joaquin A+](#)
- [Santa Cruz Ventures, Semillitas](#)
- [Value Schools LA](#)
- [West Sacramento Home Run, Ready, Set, Save!](#)



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For more information, contact us at [info@earlywealthpartnership.org](mailto:info@earlywealthpartnership.org)