

AbilityPath: Learning Links

Palo Alto

Provider Profile

AbilityPath is a non-profit organization dedicated to the needs of children and adults with developmental disabilities providing a wide range of supportive services. Among their programs AbilityPath operates five Learning Links inclusive childcare centers in the Bay Area.

“We are adapting to meet the community’s needs while demand for specific age groups is shifting and the grant is helping us make changes to serve those needs.”

– Learning Links Palo Alto, grantee

Grant Activities

AbilityPath was awarded a center operations grant to create a fifth classroom and expand their enrollment at Learning Links Palo Alto. With the shift to Transitional Kindergarten, Learning Links anticipated additional need for two to three year old students, but as their planning progressed during the grant term, staff identified that an infant classroom for 12-24 months provided a better match with community demand.

Learning Links Palo Alto already had an open flex space in the center of the building with access to a small outdoor play area. By dividing that space in two, a new classroom was added and licensed to provide care for up to twelve infants. Prior to the opening of this new room the youngest children enrolled were two-year olds.



Use of Funds

AbilityPath was awarded an operations grant to support establishing a new classroom which allowed for the enrollment of children as young as 12 months in their inclusive childcare program at Learning Links Palo Alto. Grant Funds were used to support:

- **Additional staffing for the classroom including three teachers and additional hours for a developmental specialist that supports inclusive programming for children with developmental disabilities.**
- **Furniture, equipment and toys to outfit the new classroom and outdoor space.**
- **Advertising expenses to support hiring of staff and enrollment of children.**

AbilityPath: Learning Links (continued)

“Our primary challenge has been the delay in receiving licensing approval for the new classroom. We anticipate steady and growing interest in toddler programming now that the new 12–24-month classroom is approved and open.”

– AbilityPath Palo Alto

Lessons Learned

AbilityPath, like many childcare centers are experiencing a loss of enrollment with the statewide availability of Transitional Kindergarten. Centers are pivoting to provide care to younger children to fill vacancies and meet community needs, including adding dedicated infant and toddler spaces. Providers report the enrollment of younger children fills immediate vacancies but also supports continued enrollment over years. These changes often involve short term expenses to outfit and staff spaces, but support the long-term sustainability of the centers.

Policy Issues

Access to Universal Transitional Kindergarten has the potential to benefit many children and families but draws four-year old children away from existing childcare providers. As centers adjust to serving younger children, there are challenges with affording the upfront costs to set up a new classroom necessary to enroll and bring in additional revenue. This challenge paired with delays of several months for state agencies to review applications of centers to add classrooms or shift to serve younger children can make it prohibitive for centers to add the spaces needed for families of young children.

Potential Policy Actions

- **Surge capacity of state childcare licensing agencies to be able to support an influx of requests from providers to add licensed capacity for younger children in response to statewide Transitional Kindergarten implementation.**
- **Provide one-time grants to help centers bridge the expenses of adding infant or toddler classroom to include furniture, equipment, and initial hiring.**
- **Offer higher subsidies and increase the income threshold for subsidy eligibility for families with a child with diagnosed developmental or physical disability.**



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