COMMITMENT
INTEGRITY
LEADERSHIP

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FACT SHEET

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Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment

Insufficient Oversight and Unreliable Data Threaten the Program's Goals

Background

Citing concerns about children's oral health, the State created the Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA) program in 2006, which requires certain students to present proof of having received an oral health assessment by a qualified dental health professional. Families can waive the oral health assessment requirement for specific reasons, such as a lack of access to dental health care. To facilitate completion of the assessment, school districts must notify students' parents or guardians of this requirement and must submit an annual report on the results of these assessments, including any waivers received. Statewide entities, including the California Department of Public Health (DPH) and the California Department of Education (CDE), are also responsible for certain aspects of the KOHA program. The Legislature created this program, in part, so the State could then use the data collected from students' assessments or their reasons for waiving the assessment to facilitate better intervention to improve dental health.

Key Findings

- DPH and school districts have not ensured that KOHA program data are reliable.
  - » Although DPH is responsible for the statewide database used for storing KOHA program data, the department has not established controls that would better ensure that the KOHA data it receives from districts are reliable.
  - » DPH does not use KOHA program data to measure the State's progress in improving childhood oral health despite its plan to do so.
  - » The six school districts we audited did not maintain reliable data about all aspects of the KOHA program, challenging the State's ability to use KOHA data to determine the number of students with dental health needs.
- The State lacks effective oversight of the KOHA program.
  - » The districts we audited did not provide parents with all required information regarding the KOHA program.
  - » Neither DPH nor CDE are assigned oversight responsibility for the KOHA program and they do not generally perform oversight activities, which challenges the State's ability to identify and address any KOHA program shortcomings.
- The Legislature could streamline KOHA requirements and incentivize on-site assessments.
  - » On-site dental assessments in which students obtain their assessments at school sites appear to increase the number of assessed students, and the State could make changes to the KOHA program to encourage schools to host on-site dental assessments.

Key Recommendations

Legislature

The Legislature should amend state law to identify DPH as the state entity responsible for oversight of the KOHA program and amend state law to clarify the notification and reporting requirements that districts conducting on-site dental assessments are subject to.

DPH

- DPH should compare districts' KOHA program data against CDE enrollment data to identify potentially unreasonable district reports and notify these districts they may have submitted incorrect data.
- DPH should contact districts that did not report KOHA program data to remind them of their reporting obligations and encourage them to report as required.
- DPH should begin regularly publishing on its website annual analyses of the KOHA program data.

School Districts

The districts we reviewed should ensure that they provide parents with all required KOHA information and report complete and accurate KOHA program data to the State.