



Policy Brief:

Creating Equity for and within the Early Childhood Workforce

June 2021



Historical and Current Racial and Ethnic Inequities

In the last year, the country has faced two pandemics: the pandemic of the coronavirus and the pandemic of systemic racism. Both have impacted children, families, and the early childhood workforce. While the COVID-19 pandemic may be on the wane, the toxic stress of pervasive racism will continue for early childhood educators of color, who are immigrants, or indigenous people unless there is a significant shift in policies, resources allocation, and practices.

Despite all the research on the critical development of young children and the complexity of nurturing and teaching children from birth to kindergarten entry, the 2.3 million individuals in the early education workforce, predominantly women, have been treated as less worthy of recognition, respect, and fair compensation than other professions. In addition to the inadequate public financing of early childhood programs, there have been structural policy barriers as well. The early years of the Social Security program denied caregivers participation in this critical economic insurance program. In the not-so-distant past, several states mandated English-only in classrooms, including higher education. Barriers to higher education in the form of cost, support, and environments that do not foster belonging and inclusion are exacerbating inequities in professional growth and ultimately, compensation.

When examining the workforce data,¹ by race and ethnicity, there are stark disparities in career progression and compensation. Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black educators and those who speak with children in a language other than English are more likely to have the Child Development Associate than a bachelor's degree.ⁱ

1. Many reports on the workforce rely on the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education which is being updated.

i. Paschall, K., Madill, R., & Halle, T. (2020) Professional characteristics of the early care and education workforce; Descriptions by race, ethnicity, languages spoken, and nativity status. OPRE Report #2020-107. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.





Historical and Current Racial and Ethnic Inequities, Cont'd

The same holds true for early childhood educators who are immigrants. Center-based teachers are less likely to be of the same race or ethnicity as the children and families they serve. Children in centers whose home language is not English and who have household members who are immigrants – are less likely to have a teacher who speaks a non-English language or who themselves are immigrants.ⁱⁱ Early childhood educators of color were also more likely to be paid less than their White colleagues.ⁱⁱⁱ



National Center's Commitment to Equity and Social Justice

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center uses a variety of strategies, including the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship and Child Care WAGES® Program as well as other initiatives, to inform policy change.

At its core, the National Center's focus is breaking down barriers to debt-free and successful completion of credentials and higher education degrees for family child care providers, teachers and directors in center-based programs, and other early childhood educators with big dreams and few resources. For the last decade, the Center has been intentional in examining race and ethnicity data of T.E.A.C.H. participants and graduates and comparing those data to similar demographic data on children from birth through age four for each state partner.

When the Center first started this process, we wanted to see if T.E.A.C.H. recipients mirrored the racial/ethnic diversity of the children in their states. We shared our analyses with the states, built this expectation into one of the standards for operating a high-quality T.E.A.C.H. program, and focused on helping states become more intentional on this work for their T.E.A.C.H. counselors. Data from FY20 showed that a high proportion of T.E.A.C.H. recipients were first-generation college students (49%), began college with T.E.A.C.H. funding (53%), were people of color and/or Latinx (51%), and were teachers earning an average of \$12.15 an hour (75%).

The positive outcomes extend beyond the individual educator. Participants report that when they go to college, it raises the expectations for their children to go to college. By earning degrees, these teachers realize upward career mobility, earning more money and having more professional opportunities in the field. This in turn benefits their families economically, moving some of these teachers and their children out of poverty. Children in these classrooms reap the benefit of a better-educated, more effective teacher. When teachers and administrators have postsecondary degrees, they receive a higher reimbursement rate from the State and may be eligible to receive the better per-child state prekindergarten funding.

ii. Paschall, K., Madill, R., & Halle, T. (2020). Demographic characteristics of the early care and education workforce: Comparisons with child and community characteristics. OPRE Report #2020-108. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
iii. McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.



Policy Recommendations

Postsecondary Education Access and Affordability

- Increase the federal Pell Grant maximum award so that more low-income early childhood educators have a solid debt-free foundation of financial aid to pay for tuition, books, and fees. (federal)
- Encourage states to use their Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) quality dollars to expand the number of participants in T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship that provides a grant, grant supports, counseling, and a wage increase tied to progress. (federal)
- Increase funds for the Child Care Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) so that early childhood educators have child care for their own children while they take classes and study. (federal)
- Expand when and how coursework is offered to meet the needs of working adult students. (state, local)

Equity, Justice, and Belonging in Higher Education

- Increase funds to Tribal Colleges and Universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Historically Hispanic Colleges and Universities to establish or expand early childhood education teacher preparation programs and to provide professional development for early childhood educators in their communities. (federal)
- Revise the teacher preparation curriculum for all teachers to be culturally responsive to the children and families with whom they work. (state)
- Build and support the pipeline of faculty of color and dual-language faculty in teaching and administrator roles. (state)

Quality Improvement Resources

- Distribute resources to reach providers of color and immigrants with financial and in-kind support for sustained quality improvement, including compensation increases. (federal, state, local)
- Hire people of color and dual-language to reflect the providers with whom they work as coaches, mentors, professional development providers, monitors, and technical assistance providers and support more to take on these roles. (state, local)
- Provide training to licensing and monitoring staff and quality improvement providers on implicit bias and cultural competence. (federal, state, local)

Equitable Compensation

- Provide funding to child care providers based on enrollment like Head Start and public schools that is based on the cost of quality care. (state)
- Create salary schedules that reflect fair compensation for role responsibility, education, and experience that are comparable to public school educators. (state, local)
- Track compensation (wages and benefits) along with education in workforce registries, disaggregated for race, ethnicity, age of children served, and type of setting. (state)



Policy Recommendations, Cont'd

Equity Audits and Assessments

- Adopt at all levels of government an equity impact assessment to determine how existing and proposed policies, including funding, will affect different racial and ethnic groups. This information should be shared widely and used as the basis for all future decision-making. (federal, state, local)
- Require states and localities to report how public dollars are reaching communities of color, immigrant communities. (federal)

Leadership

- Advocates and policy leaders should provide mentorships, internships, fellowships, and other deliberate advocacy opportunities for early childhood educators of color and immigrant educators to actively engage and be leaders at public policy tables. (federal, state, local)
- Ensure that early childhood councils, commissions, and taskforces include early childhood educators of color, immigrants, and tribal members. (federal, state, local)



Additional Resources

- Black Caucus of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2020). A Manifesto Demanding the End of Exploitation of Black and Brown Women in Early Childhood Education. Retrieved at <https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/racewagegap12021.pdf>
- James, C., Iruka, I., Williams, D.C., Dunbar, W. & Rountree, C. (2020). The Responsible Transformation of the Early Childhood Workforce. National Black Child Development Center. Washington, DC.
- Meek, S., Iruka, I. U., Allen, R., Yazzie, D., Fernandez, V., Catherine, E., McIntosh, K., Gordon, L., Gilliam, W., Hemmeter, M. L., Blevins, D., & Powell, T. (2020). Fourteen priorities to dismantle systemic racism in early care and education. The Children's Equity Project.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2019) Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education. NAEYC. Washington, DC.
- McLeod, M., Stechuk, R., Ryder, L., Cortez, H., & Schackelford, R. (2019) Latina Teachers and the "BA Challenge:" Impacts and Conditions of Increasing Degree Requirements in Early Childhood Education. UnidosUS. Washington, DC.
- Vogtman, J. (2017). Undervalued A Brief History of Women's Care Work and Child Care Policy in the United States National Women's Law Center. Washington, DC.



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