START WITH EQUITY

14 PRIORITIES TO DISMANTLE SYSTEMIC RACISM IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

CHILDREN'S EQUITY PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

The founding tenet of the United States – equal opportunity for all – has eluded many Americans and has never been fully realized for many communities of color. Historically, specific groups of individuals have been the subjects of exclusion, disenfranchisement, assimilation, violence, and in the case of Indigenous communities, genocide. Centuries-long battles for human and civil rights for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other communities of color have resulted in critical advancements in building a more equitable society. Despite these great achievements, inequities persist across almost every aspect of life in the United States – education, housing, health, and wealth. The tragic fact remains true in this country: children's outcomes are predicted by their demographic characteristics, the color of their skin, their family's income bracket, and their home language.

These inequities begin before birth and follow children into the early care and education (ECE) system, one of the first systems with which they interact. Indeed, grave inequities in children's access to, experiences in, and outcomes during and after early learning vary drastically based on what a child looks like, where they live, what language they speak, and where they are from.

It is essential that young children receive an equitable, positive, and healthy start. That is why any policy agenda to dismantle systemic racism in this country must include bold reforms to the ECE system that concretely address **equity in access, experiences, and outcomes**. Although the challenges in our system are complex and stepping away from the status quo is not an easy task, proactive investments and policy reforms to address racial equity in ECE will ripple into other inequitable domains of life – K-12 education, employment, wealth building — and across generations.

The murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police in the Spring of 2020, and the continuous stream of police violence experienced by Black Americans for generations, coupled with the disproportionately negative impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, has thrust this nation into another moment of racial reckoning. Protestors, led by Black Americans, have forced open an opportunity for meaningful, systemic, and sweeping change that can bridge long-standing disparities in access to resources and opportunity in the United States. The fight against systemic racism is not new. We stand on the shoulders of our foremothers and fathers. But the work is unfinished and requires a continued commitment to change. The transformative change we seek requires identifying, with specificity and concreteness, the manifestation of systemic racism in our ECE system and implementing policies to dismantle it.

It is against this backdrop that the Children's Equity Project, with funding from the Heising Simons Foundation, and in partnership with the Equity Research Action Coalition, the National Black Child Development Institute, the Council for Professional Recognition, the National Indian Child Care Association, the National Head Start Association, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, The Education Trust, and the Build Initiative, is issuing a new resource that names 14 critical priorities to advance equity in the ECE system. This list of policies is not meant to be exhaustive or deprioritize other changes critical to bringing about racial equity. Rather, this policy agenda is meant to serve as one actionable roadmap with specific recommendations targeted at federal and state policymakers. **These strategies do not and cannot operate in isolation to bring about the change we hope to see. Together, paired with the work of families and advocates, we believe that this agenda will move the field forward closer to realizing racial equity for our youngest children.**

Importantly, the reforms listed here are key strategies that are possible within the confines of our current systems. They are actions we can collectively take *today* to ensure more equitable systems tomorrow. Implementing these actions now, does not preclude us from concurrently reimagining what a new system could look like in the future, a partner and critically important task.

The agenda detailed here should be part of equity strategic planning processes across all levels of government and should be paired with benchmarked milestones, aggressive timelines, and anticipated outcomes that are constantly updated and improved — informed by data. Equity strategic plans facilitate the ability by the federal government, states, tribes, and localities to track their overall progress on equity and remain accountable for improvement. At a high level, these plans must focus on equitable **access** to resources and opportunity, equitable **experiences** within systems, and **outcomes** that are not predicted by demographic characteristics. The explicit goal must be equity, and the policies listed here are a set of systemic strategies that help make progress toward that goal. **These plans should stand alongside, not replace, the intentional embedding of equity into every existing system and policy. Achieving equity will require a both/and approach.**

It is also important to keep in mind the special *trust-relationship* tribes have with the federal government and how government-to-government tribal consultation is necessary between government agencies providing services or changing policy. Too often, tribal consultation

is seen as a barrier, instead of a strength, and leaves tribes out of opportunities for support and systems improvement that other states and programs benefit from.

It may be tempting to turn away from bold reforms during this uncertain and difficult time in American history – a global pandemic, economic upheaval, and the long-standing battle against racial inequality. But we believe that these challenges highlight the serious inequities and injustices at the foundation of the United States, and more specifically, within the ECE system. They make it even more urgent to use this moment to concretely identify systemic racism in ECE and to use that knowledge to re-envision a new reality for our youngest children, their families, and their communities. Congress, federal agencies, states, and tribes must partner with local communities, advocates, and families to act now.

> **Equitable learning systems provide access to resources, opportunities, and experiences to children and families that result in positive outcomes that are not associated with children's demographic characteristics. They actively and continuously identify and intentionally eliminate manifestations of systemic racism and other forms of oppression.**

1 DISSEMINATE PUBLIC FUNDS EQUITABLY.

Resources matter. For generations, children of color have been relegated to lower-quality learning experiences and underfunded schools. Equal funding has historically been out of reach, let alone *equitable* funding. Although for most of U.S. history, white people have been explicitly prioritized for resources on the basis of race,[1] this same system of white supremacy makes it illegal today to prioritize people of color. A 2018 report by The Education Trust found that nationwide, school districts serving the most students of color receive $1,800 less per student than districts serving the least.[2] The compounded effects of chronically underfunded systems and historical marginalization of generations of children of color, including Black, Indigenous, and Latinx children, children of migrant/seasonal farmworkers, and others, make it necessary to approach funding equitably. Indeed, realizing racial equity requires equitable funding that considers historical and current marginalization — including on the basis of race, resource gaps in communities, and disparities in outcomes.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

☑ Informed by the proposed National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine study referenced below, establish equitable funding formulas across learning systems that address historical marginalization and disparities in access to resources, quality experiences, and outcomes.

☑ Fully fund programs targeted at supporting historically marginalized communities, including Head Start,[i] IDEA, Titles I and III of ESSA, and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) programs. Increase tribal set-asides for ECE programs to ensure that Tribal Nations, American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), and Indigenous communities have equitable access to ECE funding. Increase migrant and seasonal farmworker set-asides for Head Start and Title I in order to address the complex and unique needs of children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers.

☑ Expand access to the comprehensive services provided in Head Start by increasing funding for the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships program. Expand the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships to preschool-age children through new Head Start — Child Care, Head Start — Pre-K, and Head Start — BIE partnership programs.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

☑ Fund a new NASEM study to examine equitable funding models across the ECE and K-12 education systems that consider historical and current marginalization, and disparities in access to resources, experiences, and outcomes.

☑ Require all applicants for federal ECE funding to include data on resource disparities in their communities, and describe how they will close such disparities and prioritize funding for the most marginalized communities. If funded, grantees should develop benchmarks and timelines, and report on their progress.

☑ Prioritize applicants for federal funding who propose to serve the most marginalized communities with less access to resources. In any existing or new competitive grants, the goal should be to *equitably* expand high-quality learning opportunities, measured in part by where, how, and to whom applicants propose to invest resources.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

☑ Consider historical and current marginalization and disparities in access to resources, experiences, and outcomes when allocating ECE resources, including child-care contracts, technical assistance, coaching, and professional development.

☑ Use tiered quality rating and improvement systems to provide larger reimbursement to programs serving historically marginalized communities and children and ensure livable wages for providers of color and those serving in these communities. Use Child Care and Development Fund quality funding to develop or expand efforts to support child care providers serving historically marginalized communities to enter rating systems. Tribes should receive additional funding to implement a quality rating system that incorporates their cultures and technical assistance when requested, and tribal consultation should be facilitated to determine how to best support tribes in this process.

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[i] Early Head Start, Head Start, Migrant-Seasonal Head Start, and American-Indian Alaska Native Head Start and Early Head Start are collectively referred to as Head Start in these policy recommendations, unless otherwise specified.

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2 MOVE TOWARD HOLISTIC, STRENGTHS-BASED, AND AUTHENTIC INTEGRATION.

Undoubtedly, Brown vs. Board of Education and the court cases that preceded and followed it were important victories for the civil rights of Black Americans and other people of color. Unfortunately, implementation has been incomplete and inadequate, and several court cases since have undercut and reversed some of the gains made. Today, our schools are on a trajectory, started over three decades ago, toward increased segregation.[3] And a recent study by the Urban Institute found that ECE programs are even more racially segregated than K-12 schools.[4]

Perhaps most importantly, desegregation in the years after Brown did not result in the holistic integration of children, staff, leaders, curriculum, and pedagogy. Indeed, part of the unmet potential of Brown was that it resulted only in physical desegregation of children, mainly on the backs of Black children who were physically, emotionally, and psychologically traumatized and terrorized. Desegregation orders ignored the value of Black teachers and administrators, Black-centered curriculum and pedagogy, and culturally-affirming family engagement. Implementation did not result in equity, and today, inequities in funding remain. What's more, other education levers have been exploited to re-segregate and continue this racist ideology, via gifted and talented programs, special education placement, and discipline, among others. It is critical that we continue the work started by civil rights leaders decades ago — in tandem with the other policy recommendations in this document — especially equitable funding, and move past desegregation to meaningful and holistic integration.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

- ☑ Fund a targeted, universal approach to ECE, where access to high-quality early learning experiences are accessible to all, but targeted comprehensive supports are available to those who have been most marginalized through systemic racism. This approach also requires that the most marginalized children are at the front of the line to receive services.

- ☑ In Head Start reauthorization, incentivize holistic, strengths-based, and authentic integration, especially socioeconomic integration, across all aspects of programmatic operations, that results in diverse educators and administrators, and culturally-affirming curriculum, pedagogy, and family engagement. Authorize and expand funding for the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships and expand the model to include Head Start-Child Care, Pre-K, and BIE partnerships.

- ☑ Fund new construction for early childhood programs, prioritizing tribal lands and physical locations that promote socioeconomic and racial integration, while not reducing access or creating more barriers for historically marginalized communities.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

- ☑ Prioritize ECE grant applicants who have a plan for socioeconomic and racial integration and who propose to expand slots in locations that enable greater integration.

- ☑ Issue guidance and technical assistance on funding models that bring together federal, state, tribal, and local funds for maximally integrated, inclusive, and supportive settings, and avoid siloed systems that can result in segregation by race, disability, income, or language.

- ☑ Require federal ECE grantees to use needs assessments to inform plans that increase holistic, strengths-based, and authentically integrated programs.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

- ☑ Develop plans to increase holistic, strengths-based, and authentic integration guided by community needs assessments. Collect and analyze data to inform the plan, including child demographics of enrollment by classroom and program, workforce and leadership diversity, and factors associated with culturally-affirming and responsive pedagogy.

3 EMBED EQUITY IN MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS.

Equity, and specifically the access, experiences, and outcomes of children from historically marginalized communities, in most cases, has not been centered in policymaking, and as a result, has been lacking or altogether absent in monitoring and accountability systems. There is no field-wide agreed-upon set of indicators for equity; but that is true of almost all ECE operations, including quality, and all of its subsidiaries, such as ratios, teacher qualifications, and pedagogy. We propose a set of indicators that can be used across standards, rating systems, and monitoring and accountability systems as a starting point, while acknowledging that there are many other possible indicators that can be tailored at the local level. Ultimately, it is critical that equity in access, experiences, and outcomes be monitored and incorporated into accountability systems.

EXAMPLE EQUITY INDICATORS FOR STANDARDS, MONITORING, AND RATING SYSTEMS

- Required training on the history of race, anti-racism pedagogy, and anti-bias approaches for all staff, starting at orientation and at least quarterly thereafter.
- Ongoing coaching and professional development on anti-racism pedagogy and anti-bias approaches.
- Culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and equity grounded curriculum and pedagogy.
- Curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, and family engagement linguistically accessible to families.

- Curriculum and pedagogy are delivered in a dual-language model if more than a third of children share the same home language.
- Bilingual lead teachers and other staff, if DLLs are served.
- Assessments are culturally responsive, strengths-based, and conducted in children's home language.
- Prohibition on harsh discipline and exclusionary practices.
- Ongoing disaggregated data collection and analysis to identify and rapidly address disparities.

- Policy on family engagement includes eliciting input from families on programmatic operations, stresses parent-teacher partnerships with an emphasis on relationship building to support children's learning, and promotes family wellness and leadership.
- No segregated or self-contained classrooms by funding stream that result in racial/ethnic, language, disability, or socioeconomic segregation.
- Continuously tracks and addresses racial and other forms of workforce compensation inequity.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

☑ Request annual Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports on equitable access to quality programming, quality experiences, and disparities in outcomes across ECE programs. Direct HHS, BIE, and ED to investigate areas of concern across each of those three measures and provide targeted technical assistance.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

☑ Ensure all federal ECE monitoring and accountability systems, including Head Start, child care, IDEA Parts C and B 619, BIE ECE programs, and Preschool Development Grants, explicitly include equity indicators (see above for examples). Ensure that these monitoring indicators inform accountability and renewals or continuations of funding.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

☑ Ensure all federal ECE monitoring and accountability systems, including Head Start, child care, IDEA Parts C and B 619, BIE ECE programs, and Preschool Development Grants, explicitly include equity indicators (see above for examples). Ensure that these monitoring indicators inform accountability and renewals or continuations of funding.

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4 ADDRESS WORKFORCE EQUITY.

The ECE workforce is replete with inequities when examined by race, setting type, and job position, according to data from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley.[5] More white teachers are likely to be represented in school-sponsored ECE programs, which provide higher pay and benefits, but have a barrier to entry (i.e., credential) for many people of color, due to historical vestiges of racism and inequitable educational opportunities. Even when education is equated, Black ECE educators make 78 fewer cents per hour than their white peers.[6] Teachers of color are also overrepresented in aide/assistant teacher roles compared to white teachers, who are overrepresented in lead teacher roles. In addition, Black ECE educators are also overrepresented as infant/toddler teachers compared to white ECE educators. Importantly, rigorous research has found benefits to having access to same-race lead teachers. One study randomly assigned children in K-3 to a Black teacher and found that those children were significantly more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college than their peers without similar access.[7] For dual language learners, access to lead teachers who speak their home language facilitates family engagement and is necessary for dual language instruction, which research finds is associated with improved academic and social-emotional outcomes.[8] Equitable representation in lead teacher positions and compensation — including pay, benefits, and workforce conditions — matter to the adults who do this critical work and to the children and the families whom they serve. It is critical that the ECE system address workforce inequities.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

- ☑ Increase funding for Child Care and Development Block Grant, including the tribal set aside, and direct states/tribes to use part of the funding to increase the value of the child care subsidy to increase workforce compensation.

- ☑ Increase funding for Head Start and direct grantees to increase workforce compensation, aligned with K-12 teachers in the community.

- ☑ Increase funding for existing teacher and education leadership scholarships, fellowships, and apprenticeship programs across the government, and prioritize Black, Indigenous, Latinx, other students of color, as well as bilingual students and students with disabilities. Increases in funding should include academic support services, allow students to receive college course credits for completing post-secondary courses during high school, and provide loan relief for students who are teaching or providing other ECE services in opportunity zones or child care deserts.

- ☑ Fund a new grant program that provides pathways for paraprofessionals and others in non-lead teacher roles, especially bilingual staff and staff of color, to attain the credentials, including higher education credentials, to become lead teachers.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

- ☑ Require pay parity, at a minimum, with K-12 teachers, across ECE programs that receive federal funds, regardless of age group taught. Strongly encourage greater compensation for non-school-based ECE programs to ensure benefit parity, including in tribal programs.

- ☑ Require states to track, report, and develop plans to address racial and other disparities in compensation and access to other publicly funded support systems, such as coaching and professional development. Work in partnership with tribal communities to track similar information.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

- ☑ Increase the value of child care subsidies to increase fairness in compensation, including pay and benefits, for child care providers.

- ☑ Track and develop plans to address racial disparities in compensation.

- ☑ Use tiered quality rating and improvement systems to provide greater compensation to bilingual ECE professionals and those serving historically marginalized communities.

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5 EMBED EQUITY IN WORKFORCE PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT.

Equity is sorely missing or an inadequate component of ECE preparation (including higher education) and professional development systems, at all levels, including frontline staff, teachers, coaches, leadership and systems leaders. Anyone working in the ECE system should have comprehensive and sustained training on the history of race and racism, implicit bias and its manifestations in decision making, culturally responsive and sustaining practices and pedagogy, dual language learning, inclusive best practices, and building positive relationships with diverse families, among others. All credentials, including the Child Development Associate, Associate's degrees, Bachelor's degrees, and graduate degrees, should include as a condition of receiving the credential, an assessment that examines competency of working with children and families from diverse backgrounds. Recommendations to non-governmental organizations, like higher education, are outside the scope of this report. We recognize, however, that fundamental systems change must include partnership across preparation systems and government.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

- ☑ Bring together education, child care, and Head Start funds to develop a new technical assistance center focused solely on promoting equity in learning settings across the ECE system and the early grades, including in Tribal Nations, Indigenous communities, and migrant seasonal farmworker communities. This center would develop equity resources, training, and technical assistance for states, communities, professional preparation and workforce development systems, local education agencies, early intervention and special education systems, and ECE programs across the system, and ensure that equity is embedded in the work of other ECE technical assistance centers across both HHS and the Department of Education.

- ☑ Use executive actions to require workforce racial equity training and coaching for ECE providers working in publicly funded systems.

- ☑ Fund research on effective racial equity training models and approaches in ECE systems to work toward attaining quality control. Disseminate results through technical assistance systems, including systems that support tribal communities.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

- ☑ Ensure racial equity training content or coursework is required as part of child care, teacher, and administrator professional credentialing and licensing systems, and ongoing continuing education requirements.

- ☑ Expand the racial literacy of all coaches in the professional development system. All quality coaches, including pyramid model coaches, inclusion coaches, mental health consultants, and others, that operate in states should be knowledgeable about the history of race and systemic racism and how it manifests in learning settings, equipped to explicitly address disparity and bias, and provide coaching with an equity lens that builds on child and family strengths.

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6 EXPLICITLY INCLUDE EQUITY IN THE DEFINITION OF QUALITY AND ACROSS RATING SYSTEMS.

The concept of quality drives resources and funding in the ECE system. Quality is written into legislation and regulation and has accompanying funding allocations. The ECE field has typically defined "quality" as some combination of teacher credentials, research-based curriculum and assessment, ratios and group sizes, access to comprehensive services, and teacher-child interactions among others.[9] Indicators that explicitly promote equity, via equitable experiences and equitable outcomes for children, have been almost universally excluded from this important definition and as a result, from Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). Equitable supports for the workforce have been notably lacking, with women of color and non-center-based settings having less access to the supports needed to access and move through QRIS. As such, serious and legitimate concerns have been raised by advocates about whether QRIS is exacerbating inequities. We share these concerns and contend that substantial changes must be made to these systems. The field must explicitly include equity in the definition of quality and correspondingly, include it in every level of QRIS. A program simply cannot be deemed "quality" if its programming, experiences, and outcomes are inequitable. Just as important is ensuring publicly funded programs and their workforce – particularly programs serving children from historically marginalized communities — have the support they need to move up through QRIS. Too often, these rating systems ignore equity content in their indicators, are inaccessible to the providers who serve the most marginalized children, and penalize programs who are experiencing systemic barriers. It is critical that these systems be redesigned, in partnership with parents and providers, to center equity.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

☑ Ensure that any articulation of quality standards in legislation explicitly integrates equity as an indicator of quality, including issues related to access to resources, children's experiences, and outcomes.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

☑ Ensure that, moving forward, any federal funding for QRIS requires states to articulate how equity is integrated in indicators across all levels of their systems, includes parent and provider voice, and equitably gives supports to providers serving the most marginalized children, including family child care providers and others providing services in home-based settings, to move through the system.

☑ Provide policy guidance and technical assistance to states/tribes to encourage and support them in using their Child Care Development Fund quality funding to build more equitable systems through, for example, implementation of the policies and practices listed here.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

☑ Ensure their QRIS and similar quality initiatives include equity indicators at every level (see page 7 for examples) and provide targeted funding to support programs in meeting such indicators, especially programs serving historically marginalized communities and programs that have historically had less access to systemic resources, including family child care and other home-based providers.

☑ Use flexible federal funds intended to increase the quality of services to implement targeted state/tribal technical assistance, workforce development, and new policies to support more equitable systems.

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7 ENSURE HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION ARE ACCESSIBLE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE.

Curriculum and pedagogy are the frameworks used to prepare the early learning environment and maximize educational opportunities for children. Unfortunately, the content of widely used pedagogies and curricula rarely addresses equity. Several pedagogical approaches and curricula that have been shown to support child development, referred to as "ideal learning approaches" (e.g., Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio),[10] have not been accessible to young children from historically marginalized communities and have traditionally served and still often serve white and higher wealth families 10. A recent report from Trust for Learning cited several barriers to expanding such approaches, including the cost, duration, and exclusive English credentialing. This lack of diverse high-quality pedagogical and curricula options, and the challenges associated with accessibility, further perpetuate historical marginalization. Inequities also exist in gifted and talented education (GATE) systems. According to federal data, Black and Latinx students make up 42% of student enrollment but 21% in GATE. Research finds that White children are twice as likely as Black children to be in GATE, even when they share the same math and reading scores. inequities in GATE, range from how gifted is defined and measured, to bias in referral, to access and availability of GATE programs in schools primarily serving Black and Latinx children and children from low-income communities. All children, especially those from historically marginalized communities, should have access to these programs.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

- ☑ Provide targeted technical assistance to states/ tribes, communities, and ECE programs – especially those serving children from historically marginalized communities – in identifying high-quality pedagogical approaches and curricula.

- ☑ Fund research that identifies the most effective, culturally and linguistically responsive, and scalable pedagogical approaches and curricula across ECE settings.

- ☑ Develop and pilot a new measurement tool or set of tools that assess equitable learning opportunities — including pedagogy and curriculum — within ECE programs.

- ☑ Provide guidance to states on assessing whether racial disparities in GATE exist and on remedying any such disparities. Direct federal technical assistance efforts to support implementation.

- ☑ Fund research to evaluate the effectiveness of policies to close disparities in access to and enrollment in GATE, including more accurate, anti-bias, culturally grounded methods to assess giftedness.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

- ☑ Include equitable access to learning approaches that are developmentally appropriate, child-centered, and play-based in-state/tribal QRIS.

- ☑ Provide targeted funding and technical assistance to expand access to these approaches in Pre-K and child care, prioritizing historically marginalized communities.

- ☑ Inventory schools and ECE programs currently using successful pedagogical approaches and curricula that result in closing opportunity gaps and disparities. Lift these examples up as models for other schools and programs to visit and learn from.

- ☑ Invest in expanding GATE in historically marginalized and lower-resourced communities. Invest in embedding enriched learning opportunities in every classroom, starting with historically marginalized and lower-resourced communities.

- ☑ Invest in ongoing professional development opportunities to minimize the impact of bias in teachers' and other staff's GATE identification and referral decisions.

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8 ENSURE GLOBAL CLASSROOM QUALITY MEASUREMENT EXPLICITLY ASSESSES EQUITABLE EXPERIENCES.

The most widely used global classroom quality measures include the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and the Environment Rating Scales (ERS). These tools have shown the importance of examining enriching opportunities, quality of teacher-child interactions, and instructional and learning supports for children.[11] Unfortunately, these observation instruments are limited in their attention to and incorporation of equity in relationships and teacher-child interactions, and do not measure bias in any form. They also do not yield information on individual child experiences and leave us with the question: if a classroom is rated a 5 in quality, does that translate to every child — particularly those who have been historically marginalized — getting a "5" experience? Considering the focus on improving classroom quality in learning settings, especially for marginalized children, there is a need to modify existing tools or develop new, practical, valid, and reliable observation tools that explicitly measure equity in opportunity inside learning settings. This will advance our efforts to identify and intervene on disparity in treatment and experiences.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

☑ In all upcoming ECE-related legislation, ensure that any requirements related to global classroom quality measurement include explicit measurement of equity indicators at the program or classroom level with a valid and reliable tool. Classroom quality measurements that do not explicitly address equity are insufficient in themselves.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

☑ Fund new research to identify, adapt, and develop feasible, valid, and reliable measurement tools that capture equity in global classroom quality measurement.

☑ Direct technical assistance system to support states/tribes and early childhood programs on measuring equity at the classroom and program levels.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

☑ Ensure that equity measurement at the program or classroom level is explicitly incorporated into any state or tribe funding or monitoring related to global classroom quality measurement via QRIS systems or otherwise.

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9 ELIMINATE HARSH DISCIPLINE.

Harsh discipline, as defined here, includes expulsion, suspension, corporal punishment, seclusion, and inappropriate restraint. There is no evidence that these forms of discipline are effective; instead, there is an abundance of research that indicates that they are associated with negative child outcomes.[12] Research shows that suspension and expulsion, for example, are associated with school disengagement, grade retention, and school dropout.[13] Some of these forms of discipline start early and happen often. Across all forms of harsh discipline, Black children are disproportionately affected, despite the fact that there is no evidence that they have worse or more frequent misbehavior, highlighting the insidious nature of racism and the strong presence of implicit bias in decision-making.[14] For example, recently released federal data from the 2017-18 school year indicate that Black boys make up 18 percent of male preschoolers, but 41 percent of male preschool suspensions, while Black girls make up just under one-fifth of female preschoolers, but account for more than half of female preschool suspensions.[15] American Indian/Alaska Native children are also often disproportionately affected, as are school-aged children with disabilities. This preschool pushout is perhaps the clearest manifestation of the systemic preschool-to-prison pipeline. Corporal punishment, which is legal in public schools in 19 states and in private schools in 48 states, is also a significant issue, even in young children. Federal data from the Civil Rights Data Collection indicate that 856 preschoolers were subject to corporal punishment in public Pre-K programs in the 2017-18 school year. Data on seclusion, the practice of locking children in a room alone without the ability to get out, is not collected nationally for young children, but a 2012 GAO report included case studies of young children, including a 4-year-old. These forms of discipline not only steal valuable learning time away from children, they also have devastating effects on children's feelings of safety and belonging, social and emotional development, family relationships, and school engagement. It is essential that the ECE system prohibit these harmful practices, attend to and address racial disparities in these and other forms of harsh discipline, and prioritize workforce preparation and development that is trauma-informed, explicitly anti-racist, and developmentally appropriate.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

☑ Pass discipline reform legislation to prohibit seclusion, corporal punishment, and exclusionary discipline in all programs that serve young children and receive public funding.

☑ Increase funding for culturally responsive and evidence-based social and emotional supports — via early childhood mental health consultants, counselors and psychologists, social-emotional curricula, and professional development opportunities that are grounded in anti-racist, social-emotional learning, including the development of a positive racial identity. Require state reporting on access to such supports, disaggregated by race, language, and disability.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

☑ Require states/tribes to report harsh discipline — including suspension, expulsion, seclusion, corporal punishment, and inappropriate restraint — disaggregated by race, gender, disability, and language in all ECE programs that receive public funding, including child care.

☑ Reinstate federal guidance to discourage the use of exclusionary and other forms of harsh discipline in learning settings. Monitor and deploy technical assistance to states with high rates and disparities.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

☑ Invest in professional preparation and development that makes training, coaching, and technical assistance available to providers on equity issues, centering knowledge building and practical strategies that are trauma-informed, explicitly anti-racist, and developmentally appropriate.

☑ Prohibit harsh discipline, including seclusion, corporal punishment, and exclusionary discipline in all ECE programs that receive public funding.

☑ Collect disaggregated data on the use of harsh discipline and support local communities on using discipline data systems, with an emphasis on disaggregating data to identify discipline decisions that are most vulnerable to implicit racial biases (i.e., vulnerable decision points).[16]

☑ Prioritize state/tribal funds for the use of interventions and personnel that positively and equitably support children's social and emotional development and wellbeing in ECE programs, including child care and Pre-K.

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10 PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND PROMOTE THEIR OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT.

Protecting the rights of children with disabilities and promoting their optimal development is critical to ensuring an equitable early care and education system. This must include addressing equity in early intervention and special education access, accurate, unbiased identification, and a full and meaningful inclusion in all programming. Today, data indicate that children of color are generally underrepresented in early intervention and preschool special education services.[17] This is concerning given the robust research base indicating the importance and effectiveness of early intervention.[18] Even when children do have access to early intervention or preschool special education services, the programs are so chronically and severely underfunded that the dosage and quality of services varies widely and is often insufficient to meet children's needs. What's more, of preschoolers receiving special education services, over half receive services in settings segregated from their peers without disabilities.[19] Once children transition to the K-12 system, data indicate that racial/ethnic disparities exist in the types of disabilities children are *identified* with, with Black children being more likely to be identified under categories that require a greater degree of subjectivity in the diagnostic process; *placement*, with Black, Latinx, and Asian American children spending less time in general education settings than their peers; and *discipline*, with children of color with disabilities being disciplined at higher rates than their white peers.[20]

CONGRESS SHOULD:

☑ Fully fund IDEA, including Parts B Section 619 and C.

☑ Increase funding for Part D of IDEA to increase monitoring and accountability - particularly those related to preschool placement and the provision of the least restrictive environment; ramp up implementation of the Equity in IDEA rule;[ii] and expand technical assistance to states/tribes and communities in providing high-quality inclusive learning to children with disabilities, especially children of color with disabilities.

☑ Request a Government Accountability Office report on barriers to access to early intervention and preschool special education for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers of color with disabilities. Direct the U.S. Department of Education to develop and implement a plan to close that gap and ensure Tribal Nations are included in this plan.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

☑ Ensure that all IDEA data reported to the federal government – including outcome data — are disaggregated by race, disability, gender, and home language.

☑ Fund a new technical assistance center focused exclusively on equity in IDEA, with an emphasis on bridging disparities in access to services, identification, inclusion, and discipline across the early childhood through K-12 continuum. Publish an annual report reviewing state progress in equitably expanding opportunity across all of these measures.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

☑ Identify segregated preschool special education programs and invest in meaningful structural reforms to expand high-quality inclusion, including working with local communities and districts to adjust budgets and staffing structures; promote co-training and coaching with early educators, special educators, and early interventionists with an explicit focus on equity and the intersection between disability and race; invest in itinerant teaching and other co-teaching models; and facilitate formal partnerships between local education agencies and community-based early childhood programs to expand the number of inclusive slots.

☑ Track and address racial, income, disability, and language background disparities in access to services, identification, inclusive placements, discipline, and high-quality supports and accommodations for young children with disabilities. Use data to deploy technical assistance and support to districts/communities with the largest disparities.

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i https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-12-19/pdf/2016-30190.pdf

11 IMPLEMENT A DATA-DRIVEN CONTINUOUS EQUITY QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CYCLE.

The concept of continuous quality improvement (CQI) is well known and widely used across the ECE system. Research indicates that continuous data-driven decision-making contributes to improvements in academic performance, teacher effectiveness through professional development, and program quality — and is a tool for communicating with stakeholders.[21] However, CQI efforts too often lack in their focus and attention to equity. All ECE programs should engage in a CQI process that centers equity. It should include the use of disaggregated data to inform practice and policy change with the goal of closing opportunity gaps and disparities in outcomes. Access to data is also key to improving opportunities for Tribal Nations, and, as in every other domain, tribal consultation must be honored in this process.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

☑ Require that all data reported to the federal government are disaggregated, at the very least, by race/ethnicity, language, and disability. Across legislation, encourage the use of and funding for continuous equity quality improvement systems.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

☑ Require all child-serving programs that receive federal funding to collect and report disaggregated data on access, experiences, and outcomes, and report how they are using the data to close racial opportunity gaps and outcomes. Tribal consultation should be honored throughout this process to ensure respectful use as determined by tribes.

☑ Ensure all data-focused technical assistance centers provide support through an equity lens, including ensuring that all data are disaggregated, understanding how to calculate disproportionality and identify vulnerable decision points, and ensuring that data are analyzed and used to inform professional development and programmatic or school policy change.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

☑ Invest in coordinated ECE data systems and ensure that they are used to track access, experience, and outcome disparities, feed information back to ECE programs and districts, and use information to target resources to remedy inequities in a timely manner. Tribal consultation should be honored throughout this process.

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12 EXPAND FAMILY LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS.

Families are children's first, primary, and longest-lasting teachers.[22] Their funds of knowledge are invaluable.[23] They must be more meaningfully centered in early childhood systems, especially Pre-K and child care systems. Head Start was founded to center families and has made the most significant strides in partnering with diverse families. The Head Start National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement framework states that "parent and family engagement...is about building relationships with families that support family well-being, strong relationships between parents and their children, and ongoing learning and development for both parents and children." Family engagement is further described in Head Start's framework as focusing on building relationships and partnerships with families through reciprocal and culturally-responsive interactions with the goal of supporting families and parents to support the development and learning of their children. Thus, the outcome is the empowerment of families and parents as life-long learners and educators for the benefit of the child, family, and community. Unfortunately, ECE systems are challenged with meeting the needs of families, especially families of color, linguistically diverse families, immigrant families, and families with children with disabilities. This is particularly problematic now, as COVID-19 continues to upend typical learning systems and families play an even more critical role in education. A central focus of building more equitable ECE systems must be better, more meaningful family engagement and partnerships.

CONGRESS SHOULD:

- [x] Promote family governance and meaningful culturally-responsive family engagement across the ECE system in legislation through standards, data reporting requirements, and targeted funding, and encourage cross-system alignment with the Head Start's Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

- [x] Collect meaningful family engagement data from federal ECE grantees, in line with the National Academies of Science Engineering and Medicine report *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8*.[24]

- [x] Require applications for federal funding to include plans for equitably fostering family engagement in culturally-responsive ways and in families' home languages with attention to shared decision-making (i.e., family governance council). Prioritize those that align most closely with the Head Start's Parent, Family, and Community Engagement framework.

- [x] Fund new research to develop and evaluate measurement tools that meaningfully capture the effectiveness of family engagement strategies that include family participation, voice, and reciprocity. Disseminate research learnings through the technical assistance system.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

- [x] Ensure all state/tribal needs assessments across ECE systems include data about the strengths, needs, and social capital of families, as well as inclusion of family participation, voice, and reciprocity.

- [x] Implement a hub model for state/tribal child care systems, including family child care and family friend and neighbor care, where providers can jointly invest in — and share access to — family engagement coordinators or specialists who provide meaningful family engagement opportunities, connect families to community services as needed, conduct staff training, and engage in consultation with administrators on how to embed family engagement across programmatic operations.

- [x] Ensure meaningful family engagement indicators are included in state standards and quality rating systems across levels (see *2016 HHS-ED Policy Statement on Family Engagement* or *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8*, for examples).

13 PRIORITIZE FAMILY CHILD CARE AND OTHER HOME-BASED CARE.

Family child care is a central — and too often overlooked — part of the ECE system. In many communities, this type of setting may be more likely to be culturally responsive, with providers who share a home language with the families they serve.[25] This sector of the field has innumerable strengths and can inform other setting types. It is an especially crucial part of the infant/toddler child care system, and may be an increasingly popular choice among families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, too often, family child care providers are left out of quality initiatives and do not get equal or equitable access to supports and resources, compared to center-based child care settings. The same is true, to an even larger extent, of family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care, which serves a critically important function to support children and help families in many communities. It is imperative that an ECE equity reform agenda include and extend resources to family child care and other home-based care settings.[26]

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

- ☑ Ensure technical assistance efforts explicitly include resources tailored to family child care and other home-based providers and leaders. Develop tools that build off of providers' strengths, and that support equitable and quality experiences for young children in their home language.

- ☑ Strongly encourage the inclusion of family child care providers — particularly those operating in child care deserts and those serving historically marginalized communities — in Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

- ☑ Ensure family child care and other ECE home-based providers are included in needs assessments, workforce development, and technical assistance efforts, and receive equitable support to access and move up QRIS.

- ☑ Use child care quality funding to develop and grow family child care networks where providers can access shared professional development opportunities, including on anti-bias and anti-racism programming, dual language immersion models, curriculum and assessment, social-emotional development, and family engagement through an equity lens. Use hubs to connect children, families, and providers to comprehensive services in the community, as needed.

- ☑ Prioritize building family child care supply and networks in child care deserts.

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14 EQUITABLY EXPAND ACCESS TO DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION APPROACHES FOR DLLS.

Dual language learners (DLLs) make up about a third of young children under age 8, most of whom speak Spanish at home.[27] These children are diverse by every measure and possess a host of strengths, including bilingualism: Research demonstrates that bilingualism is associated with cognitive advantages early in life and economic benefits later in life.[28] DLLs who receive bilingual instruction outperform their peers in English-only models in math and reading, in both English and the partner language.[29] The potential social and emotional benefits, including positive racial identity development, feelings of competence and belonging, and the more direct opportunities for family engagement, are also critical. Unfortunately, most ECE settings, like K-12, provide instruction exclusively in English. And, although bilingual learning models are growing in popularity, expansion may not be happening equitably: The very children who have the most to gain from such models, and the most to lose without them, may be under-represented in these programs.[30] This pattern represents a profound inequity: Bilingualism is seen as a strength in some children, namely more affluent, white, native English speakers, and as a deficit in others, including racialized DLLs who speak a non-English language at home. It is also important to identify strengths in and support children who speak a different English dialect, such as African American English Vernacular (AAEV), a variation of General American English spoken by some members of the African American community.[31] Evidence is clear that valuing and authentically integrating children's home language, including dialect, into instruction supports children's literacy and language development, general learning, and engagement.[32]

CONGRESS SHOULD:

☑ Invest in building capacity to expand dual language immersion opportunities for the youngest learners through a new grant program, and ensure that DLLs have priority for new slots. Ensure this program includes an explicit focus on countering the effects of assimilation policy for Indigenous children and offers support to expand Native language preservation programs.

☑ Invest in teacher preparation and alternative certification programs to increase the supply of qualified bilingual early educators, including specific pathways and supports for existing bilingual ECE staff who may be in paraprofessional or aide roles.

FEDERAL AGENCIES SHOULD:

☑ Add data on access to dual language immersion or other bilingual learning models in the Civil Rights Data Collection at the U.S. Department of Education.

☑ Invest in designing, piloting, and evaluating effective bilingual learning approaches, including Native language preservation models for Tribal Nations, from birth through the the K–12 system. Expand effective models across learning settings through technical assistance systems.

☑ Invest in developing new program quality measurement instruments to assess the quality of bilingual learning models.

☑ Provide more technical assistance on the Planned Language Approach.[iii] Ensure targeted dissemination beyond Head Start, to the broader ECE field.

☑ Ensure that Head Start monitoring and accountability systems are in line w ith new Head Start Program Performance Standards that require exposure to the home language for DLLs and English through instruction and other social learning opportunities.

STATES AND TRIBES SHOULD:

☑ Adopt Head Start DLL standards in state-funded Pre-K and incorporate standards into monitoring and accountability frameworks.

☑ Invest in producing the workforce necessary to support DLLs, including by creating nontraditional pathways to becoming a lead bilingual teacher and improving existing teacher preparation pathways in higher education to reflect research on dual language learning. Ensure these efforts include a focus on expanding capacity for Native language preservation opportunities in Tribal Nations.

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iii https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach

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CONCLUSION

The reforms listed here do not work in isolation, but combined can make significant strides in bringing greater equity in **access, experiences, and outcomes** for young children. Paired with the hard work and advocacy of grassroots leaders and families across the country, these recommendations provide actionable and important steps toward ensuring our system actively identifies systemic racism and closes opportunity and outcome gaps.

Of course, young children and their families exist and interact with multiple systems, directly and indirectly, in their early years and throughout their lives. Changes to the ECE system alone will not solve the inequities and disparities in access to resources and opportunities children face, especially Black children and other children of color. Paired with these reforms, it is also critical to support policies that address the myriad of inequities that affect Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other communities of color.

It is essential to address the racial wealth gap, equitable access to health care for families; access to clean drinking water and toxin-free living and learning environments; affordable housing; humane immigration that prioritizes keeping families together; and a fair, unbiased criminal justice system.

The racial reckoning that has taken hold in small towns and large cities across the U.S. this year presents a critical opportunity to make meaningful, sustainable, and structural change in this country. The ECE system must be at the heart of that change. The priorities and accompanying policies presented here, paired with reforms across all U.S. systems, will help bring us closer to equity, inclusion, and opportunity for all, a notion that has to date, only been an illusion for too many, for far too long.

> **Combined, the reforms listed here can make significant strides in bringing greater equity in access, experiences, and outcomes for young children.**

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