

A photograph of a Black woman with braids, smiling and looking down at two young Black children. They are sitting at a table with colorful blocks (yellow, blue, red, green). The woman is on the left, and the children are on the right. The background is a bright, indoor setting with a window.

RACIAL EQUITY AT THE FOREFRONT

PRIORITIES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDERS IN PENNSYLVANIA

*A Report from the Children First
Racial Equity Early Childhood Provider Council*

July 2024

Special Thanks to our Funders:

Philadelphia Health Partnership

Start Early

United Way of Greater Philadelphia and
Southern New Jersey

Vanguard *Strong Start for Kids Program*™

William Penn Foundation

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Introduction

In the fall of 2021, the Racial Equity Subcommittee, a subcommittee within the newly formed Early Childhood Provider Council, was created with the task of researching inequities within Pennsylvania’s early childhood system. As a result of this mission, the Racial Equity Subcommittee is submitting this brief with the support of Children First.

A high-quality early learning program is crucial in providing children with a nurturing and stimulating environment that prepares them for school and enables them to reach their full potential. However, children of color often face numerous barriers that hinder their ability to thrive. Racism, exclusion, and low expectations persist in our society, and our education system has not adequately addressed these issues. Child care providers, especially those working with children of color, understand the importance of creating an equitable playing field.

Education gaps between children of color and their white counterparts have been exacerbated by a lack of resources, funding, and professional learning opportunities. The first challenge we face is the lack of data or access to data, making it difficult to fully understand and address the disparities that exist. To combat these inequities, we identified three priority areas that require urgent attention and action.

- + Priority 1 focuses on increasing overall child care funding while providing specific guidelines for improving teacher compensation, aiming to align with that of K-12 teachers. One of the key problems we aim to address is the overrepresentation of Black and Hispanic early educators in low-paying roles within the early childhood workforce and the broader U.S. labor market. Additionally, we recognize the financial penalties that early childhood educators face which further exacerbate the disparities in compensation.
- + Priority 2 emphasizes the need for resources and funding to implement equity practices within early learning programs. This includes essential components such as the translation of materials, mental health professionals who are bilingual or culturally competent to work with children, and additional work that supports equity beyond regular program activities. The lack of funding for equity practices and the growing demand for mental and behavioral health services for children and youth are identified as critical problems that need immediate attention.
- + Priority 3 centers around enhancing equity in business and education practices through professional development and program policy reform. Research shows that Black and Brown leadership remains underrepresented in the field of education, highlighting the need for greater diversity and inclusion. Addressing these problems requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses both professional development and reforms to program policies.

In this policy brief, we delve into each of these priority areas, highlighting the issues that demand urgent action. Moreover, we will provide recommendations to address these challenges, ensuring equitable access and opportunities for all children and families in early learning programs. By prioritizing these issues and taking tangible steps toward achieving racial equity, we can build a more inclusive and just education system that supports the success of every child.

About the Racial Equity Early Childhood Provider Council

The Racial Equity Early Childhood Provider Council consists of 50 members representing 50 early childhood programs from a variety of backgrounds, including ethnic, linguistic, and immigration backgrounds located in southeastern Pennsylvania. The Provider Council plays an important role by shaping the early childhood landscape in the region. As outlined in the report, “Philadelphia’s Early Learning Community Speaks Out: An Action Plan for Quality Improvement”, the council will continue its work.

The mission of the Council is to unify the voices of early child care providers in the Philadelphia region - igniting collaborations, education, and advocacy. The Council’s efforts are to support families, children, and providers, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within communities. It works to address and/or modify public policies in child care, aiming to ensure greater equity, and inclusion, with respect to increasing the supply, accessibility, and affordability, and the definition of high-quality early childhood education programs in Pennsylvania.

The Council’s vision is to amplify the importance and value of early childhood education (ECE) through advocacy, and strengthening family and community partnership by:

- + Empowering, enhancing, and increasing equity, and ensuring access to high-quality ECE for ALL young children.
- + Providing a network of support to families representing Philadelphia’s rich cultural heritage.
- + Creating change for all providers and families by providing resources, creating equitable access, and fostering positive relationships.
- + Ensuring that public investments in early childhood quality are sustained for the long-term in all aspects including:
 - + A fair and inclusive process for all early childhood providers,
 - + Providing compensation and resources to the early childhood workforce, and
 - + Establishing an early childhood system that includes shared leadership among all participants, including providers, families, state agencies, philanthropy, businesses, and higher education.

The Racial Equity Subcommittee consists of a group of child care providers who bring together diverse perspectives, representing various types of facilities, PA Keystone STARS levels, and demographics. As individuals, we have all encountered racial disparities within Pennsylvania’s ECE landscape. Our vision is to advocate for equitable access for children and families, as well as fair compensation for ECE professionals. We strive to create an ECE system that provides support and stability to the sector which includes children, families, and staff.



The Racial Equity Early Childhood Provider Council consists of 50 members representing 50 early childhood programs playing an important role in shaping the early childhood landscape in southeastern Pennsylvania.



In our pursuit of this vision, we believe in shared leadership that includes all stakeholders, such as providers, families, elected officials, organizations, and universities. By engaging everyone, we aim to have a meaningful influence on funding decisions that shape the ECE sector. Our purpose is to facilitate the establishment of impactful early learning communities boldly committed to educational equity. As agents of change, we actively champion initiatives that promote racial equity within ECE communities. We are dedicated to translating diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice strategic plans into practical actions within the ECE community.

Our goals encompass building equitable systems, developing strategic agendas to address systemic inequities, and expanding access to equitable learning opportunities for all. Through collaborative efforts, we seek to foster positive outcomes and eliminate disparities. We are driven by the firm belief that every child, regardless of their background, deserves equal access to high-quality early learning environments to thrive. By fostering a culture of equity, inclusion, and belonging, we aim to establish an intentional process that dismantles racial disparities and improves outcomes for everyone involved in the ECE field.

Data at a Glance

Chart 1: Comparison of Children in High-Quality Child Care in Philadelphia and the State			
Child County	Race/Ethnicity	Total Number of Children	Percentage High-Quality
Philadelphia	Non-Hispanic White	1,388	42%
	Non-Hispanic Black	17,739	33%
	Hispanic or Latinx	3,331	40%
	Non-Hispanic Asian	606	59%
	Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaskan Native	<51	35-40%
	Non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<51	48-53%
	Non-Hispanic Two or more races/ethnicities	97	35%
	Some Other Race or Unknown Ethnicity	1,600	39%
	Philadelphia TOTAL	24,785	36%
	State	Non-Hispanic White	22,054
Non-Hispanic Black		36,252	35%
Hispanic or Latinx		15,629	39%
Non-Hispanic Asian		859	56%
Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaskan Native		83	37%
Non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		55	51%
Non-Hispanic Two or more races/ethnicities		1,991	46%
Some Other Race or Unknown Ethnicity		7,098	42%
State Total		84,021	41%

The chart on page 6 compares ethnicity in high-quality child care in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. Only 36% of Philadelphia child care programs are high-quality, compared to 41% in the state. Over 55% of non-Hispanic Asian children in Philadelphia and throughout Pennsylvania are enrolled in high-quality programs. Additionally, the percentage of non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanic children enrolled in high-quality programs in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania is 40% or below. Subsequently, non-Hispanic Black children in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania attend high-quality programs at lower rates; with Philadelphia at 33% and 35% for the state.



Retrieving Additional Data

Data is needed to uncover the depth and width of the inequities experienced by people of color providing early care and learning services. To understand the inequities that exist within the early childhood sector in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, the Racial Equity Subcommittee met with Shanté Brown from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) in November 2022. Because data elements are essential, we recommend a more user-friendly process be established for those not familiar with their system for retrieving data.

The Racial Equity Early Childhood Provider Council Priorities

Despite the lack of comprehensive data on children, families, and caregivers in Pennsylvania, the Council sees a real need for policy reforms. In this section, policy priorities and recommendations are presented for tackling early childhood inequalities.

Priority 1: Increasing Overall Child Care Funding with Specific Guidelines for Improving Teacher Compensation Comparable to that of K-12 Teachers

Problem 1 - “Black and Hispanic early educators are overrepresented in roles that place their wages at the bottom of the early childhood workforce and of the entire U.S. labor market” (Ceciliano, 2022).

Women make up the majority of workers in this sector and are poorly compensated, and it is more common for Black and Hispanic early educators to be assigned low-wage jobs.

Comparing the wages of white women and women of color reveals a sizable gap.

The facts are:

- + “There are racial disparities even after job title, education, geography, and program quality are taken into account. Black educators earn approximately 2% less than their white counterparts. Hispanic educators make 5% less, and other groups, including Asian and multiracial educators, make 10% less than white educators.” *(Source: https://www.childrenfirstpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PA_Child_Care_Wages_1-23.pdf)*
- + “While wages paid to early educators overall are low, additional disparities within the workforce itself cause greater harm to certain populations. As we have previously documented, across different types of settings and job roles in the sector, wage disparities are linked to funding source, age of children, and racial discrimination. For example, we found that among center-based teachers, those working full-time exclusively with infants and toddlers are paid up to \$8,375 less per year than those who work with preschool-age children. And this disparity is especially harmful to Black women working in centers, as they are more likely than their peers to work with infants and toddlers, and to Black, Latina, and immigrant women working in home-based settings, where a large share of infants and toddlers are in care. Importantly, we also identified a racial wage gap in which Black early educators are paid on average \$0.78 less per hour than their White peers. The pay gap is more than doubled for Black educators who work with preschool-age children (\$1.71 less per hour compared with their White peers) compared with the pay gap for Black educators who work with infants and toddlers (\$0.77 less per hour compared with their White peers)” *(Source: <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020>)*
- + “Compensation remains both the challenge and the solution for staffing recruitment and retention problems.
 - + 78% of survey respondents identify wages as the main recruitment challenge because they are so low that potential applicants are either relying on pandemic unemployment or are recognizing they can make more money working just about anywhere else.
 - + Similarly, 81% of respondents say that low wages are a key reason that educators leave the field, followed closely by 54% who cited a lack of benefits. A third of respondents pointed to exhaustion and burnout, while only 8% said CCW regulations were a key challenge.” *(Source: https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/blog/naeyc_july_2021_survey_progressperil_final.pdf)*
- + “In other fields, salary and wages can be indicative of the value of work completed, but chronic low wages persist despite the value placed on early childhood education.” *(Source: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10643-022-01308-3.pdf>)*
- + “Early childhood teachers earned an estimated \$12.43 per hour or less than \$25,844 per year.” *(Source: https://www.childrenfirstpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PA_Child_Care_Wages_1-23.pdf)*

- + “More than half of all state-funded pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs now require lead teachers to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher, as do many city-funded pre-K programs, yet salaries and benefits for pre-K teachers are consistently lower than the average salary for public school elementary school teachers.” (Source: <https://nieer.org/research-library/pursuit-pre-k-parity>)

Problem 2 - Educators who work with children in early childhood are penalized financially. According to the Center for the Study of Childcare Employment and the Economic Policy Institute, early childhood teachers with a bachelor’s degree are paid 22% less than their counterparts in the K-12 system. The following tables from “Invest in Quality: A Case for Paying Closer to What High-Quality Pre-K Costs,” a report released by Pre-K for PA, provides an overview of the requirements for lead teachers in early childhood education programs (Table A), and the average annual income for preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and elementary school teachers in Pennsylvania (Table B). The pay disparity and uncompetitive compensation resulted in high turnover rate, exacerbated the recruitment and retention problems of the early childhood education workforce, which negatively impacted the quality of education young children receive, and worse, caused classroom and program closures. (Source: https://www.prekforpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Pre-K-for-PA-Report_FIN.pdf)

Table A Lead Teacher: Education and Training Comparisons

Head Start	Pre-K Counts	PK-4
Education: Associate’s, Bachelor’s, or advanced degree in child development or ECE- or in a related field with coursework equivalent to a major relating to ECE and experience teaching preschool children	Education: Bachelor’s degree and ECE certificate	Education: Bachelor’s degree and ECE certificate
Complete a minimum of 15 clock hours of professional development per year	Must complete a minimum of 24 post baccalaureate credits to convert from Instructional Level I to Level II within six years	Must complete a minimum of 24 post baccalaureate credits to convert from Instructional Level I to Level II within six years
	Participate in a PDE approved teacher induction program	Participate in PDE approved teacher induction program
	150 hours of Act 48 approved professional development every five years to maintain certification	150 hours of Act 48 approved professional development every five years to maintain certification

Table B Statewide Annual Occupational Wages

	Entry Level	Average	Experienced
Preschool teacher	\$22,650	\$31,380	\$35,740
Kindergarten teacher	\$43,830	\$66,160	\$77,320
Elementary school teacher	\$48,540	\$69, 630	\$80,170

The facts are:

- + “Wages should additionally account for job role, experience, and education, with educators compensated fairly for the work they are already doing. Wage levels should calibrate upward from a living wage as the starting point to full parity with similarly qualified elementary school teachers, and Wage standards should apply whether educators are working in center or home-based programs.” (Source: <https://csce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020>)
- + “Many who are leaving wish they could stay—they spent years building their skills and accessing professional development; they love the children and families with whom they work; they poured their hearts and funds into turning their home into a safe, quality space for children to learn—but they too have to meet the needs of their own children, families, and futures.” (Source: https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/blog/compensation_matters_most.pdf)
- + “...on average, a public pre-K teacher with a bachelor’s degree can expect to earn around \$12,000 less than a public kindergarten teacher with similar credentials, according to NIEER’s 2015 State of Preschool Yearbook.” (Source: <https://eyeonearlychildhood.org/2017/05/09/equal-pay-for-preschool-teachers/>)
- + “Salaries vary considerably by state, but the average kindergarten teacher salary in the United States is just more than \$55,000, while the average child care teacher salary is \$33,000.21.” (Source: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/child-care-dollar-go/>)
- + “According to the Center for the Study of Childcare Employment and the Economic Policy Institute, early childhood teachers with a bachelor’s degree are paid 22% less than teachers in the K-8 system. In Pennsylvania, early childhood teachers are over 13 times more likely to be in poverty than K-8 teachers.” (Source: <https://www.researchforaction.org/a-living-wage-for-early-childhood-educators/>)
- + “Pre-k teachers receive pre-service training and professional development just like their K-12 counterparts so they are well-prepared in developmentally appropriate practice and instruction for the age group/developmental period that they teach.” (Source: https://www.prekforpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Pre-K-for-PA-Report_FIN.pdf)



Problem 3 - Early childhood teachers in Pennsylvania earned an estimated \$12.43 per hour or less than \$25,844 per year. This unimaginable low pay is not meeting the cost-of-living in all 67 counties in Pennsylvania. As a result, early childhood teachers aren't able to cover the cost of their basic necessities and are forced to rely on public assistance programs such as SNAP benefits and be insured by Medicaid.



In a report released by the Start Strong PA campaign, a shocking 44% of early childhood teachers revealed that they had to use payday loans or borrow money from family and friends in the past six months to cover basic necessities. Black educators are 11% more likely to have to make that choice compared to their white counterparts. The financial issues in the early childhood sector, such as low compensation, is because of the low state reimbursement rate that does not reflect the true cost of high-quality care. This results in classroom closures, leaving working families with limited child care options, and negatively impacts Pennsylvania's economy with an annual economic cost of \$6.65 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue

The facts are:

- + "Early childhood teachers earned an estimated \$12.43 per hour or less than \$25,844 per year. In 100% of the 67 Pennsylvania counties, earnings failed to meet the cost-of-living. In other words, earnings are not sufficient to cover basic necessities like housing, transportation, food, and child care." (Source: https://www.childrenfirstpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PA_Child_Care_Wages_1-23.pdf)
- + "A shocking 44% said they had to use a payday loan or borrow money from friends and family in the past six months to cover basic expenses. This is in stark contrast to the general public, of which 6% had utilized a payday loan. Black educators were 11 percentage points more than white educators to have utilized a payday loan or borrowed money from a friend. Black educators were also 12 percentage points more likely to not have a rainy day fund compared to their white educator counterparts." (Source: https://www.childrenfirstpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PA_Child_Care_Wages_1-23.pdf)
- + "For Pennsylvania, inadequate child care options impose substantial and long-lasting consequences; its effects are felt by parents, businesses, and the commonwealth's taxpayers. The top-line findings of a new study examining the economic impacts of problems in Pennsylvania's child care system on working parents, employers, and taxpayers describe the consequences. The verdict: an annual economic cost of \$6.65 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue." (Source: <https://strongnation.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/1608/2735f9c4-fa3c-4e39-8516-ed2de992b084.pdf>)

Recommendations to Increase Overall Child Care Funding and Improving Teacher Compensation:

For child care workers to receive a livable wage, ensure an equitable standard of living, and provide families with high-quality care, the Racial Equity Subcommittee recommends the following:



1. State and city child care funding should be increased across all types of programming. Childcare Works (CCW), PreK Counts (PKC), PHLPReK, and Head Start slots should be recalculated to reflect the true costs of providing quality early care and learning. *(Source: <https://scholarsphere.psu.edu/resources/8b92d196-bb9e-44bf-af2-cac1c059084a>)*
2. New funding levels for child care services made available for all providers, regardless of the type of care they provide.
3. All providers serving families at risk for school failure receive a Risk Remediation Quota to support the efforts of providing additional targeted and best practices strategies within the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework. *(Source: https://www.flgov.com/wp-content/uploads/childadvocacy/strengthening_families_protective_factors.pdf)*
4. To provide targeted and best practice support to families with special needs children, all providers serving them receive an early intervention quota that facilitates coordination, professional development, and staffing. *(Source: <https://edtrust.org/increasing-equity-in-early-intervention/>)*
5. Set a Fair and Equitable Salary Standard (FESS) for child care staff based on educational levels and experience and require documentation of meeting this standard be submitted annually by the staff receiving the FESS to ensure true compliance.
6. Create and sustain a high-quality free and subsidize health care plan for child care staff as an essential workers compensation plan via the State Supplemental Child Care Essential Worker Health Care Plan (SS-CEWHCP).
7. Create and sustain a state pension plan for child care staff as an Essential Workers Compensation plan via the State Supplemental child care Essential Worker Pension Plan (SS-CEWPP). *(Items 6 & 7 Source: <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/the-early-educator-workforce/early-educator-pay-economic-insecurity-across-the-states/>)*.
8. Create a five-year Star 4 plan for all Star 1-3 providers to reach Star 4 by 2028.

Priority 2: Provide Resources/Funding to Implement Equity Practices

For example: translation of materials, mental health professionals that are bilingual or culturally competent to work with our children, work that supports equity in addition to normal program activities, etc.

Problem 1 - Lack of Funding and Equity Practices: Everyone wants their children to succeed in school, no matter where they live or what they believe. However, acquiring a good education today is an uphill battle and requires a multi-layer approach. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 aimed to advance equity while providing students with the support they need. The vision, however, has not been fully realized. Across the country, states and school districts are still waiting for their fair share. Federal government spending on education accounts for less than 10% of total spending. Additionally, state and local governments play a role, but the federal government plays a much larger role than simply providing money. It also involves protecting civil rights and ensuring equal opportunity for all students. All students deserve an education that inspires them, encourages their curiosity, and prepares them for success. The support, resources, and time educators need to do their jobs well, as well as the security to retire with dignity, are all critical.

(Source: <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/action-center/nea-in-congress>)

Problem 2 - Mental health support in education: There is a growing and unmet need for mental and behavioral health services for children and youth. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one in five children and adolescents experience a mental health problem during their school years, such as stress, anxiety, bullying, family problems, depression, learning disabilities, and alcohol and substance abuse. Mental health problems, such as self-injurious behaviors and suicide, are on the rise, especially among youth. Sadly, many children and youth do not receive the help they need, and disparities in access to care exist in low-income communities. (Source: <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/mental-and-behavioral-health/additional-resources/comprehensive-school-based-mental-and-behavioral-health-services-and-school-psychologists>)

Even though we understand the importance of Early Intervention and educational supports, there is a deficit in acquiring these resources and a lack of transparency in current resource allocation. According to the RCPA Early Intervention Steering Committee Position Paper on The State of Early Intervention Funding in Pennsylvania in 2023, “Despite efforts to improve funding for this program, recent increases have not matched inflationary increases or the real costs of providing this service” and “rising costs and the nearly stagnant reimbursement rate have been a tremendous financial burden on the provider system.” (Sources: <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/mental-and-behavioral-health/additional-resources/comprehensive-school-based-mental-and-behavioral-health-services-and-school-psychologists>). <https://www.paproviders.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/EI-Position-Paper-State-of-Early-Intervention-in-PA-in-2023.pdf>



Even though we understand the importance of Early Intervention and educational supports, there is a deficit in acquiring these resources and a lack of transparency in current resource allocation.



Problem 3 - Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood

Settings: The suspension and expulsion in the ECE setting is merely the tip of an iceberg that indicates underlying causes that go beyond implicit biases.

As stated by Kate Zinsser, “Each child’s expulsion is symptomatic of a much larger problem - an overburdened, underfunded, undervalued, and fragmented early education system.” (Source: <https://scholars.org/contribution/why-ending-expulsions-us-preschools-requires-more-passing-laws-ban-them>)

The expulsion and suspension rates of children in Pennsylvania child care facilities are a pressing issue that demands greater research attention. According to the U.S. Department of Education, “Black preschool children are 3.6 times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as white preschool children. Children with disabilities and emotional challenges are 14.5 times as likely to be suspended or expelled as typically developing peers.” (Source: <https://gafcp.org/2023/04/11/the-impact-of-early-suspension-and-expulsion-on-long-term-child-outcomes/>)



This research is essential as expulsion and suspension rates in child care can have long-lasting consequences on a child’s development. Statistics have revealed distinct disparities, with Brown and Black children and children with disabilities encountering the worst of these exclusionary practices. By having a closer examination into the factors contributing to these biases, researchers can identify patterns and systemic issues that perpetuate this inequity. This knowledge can be instrumental in shaping evidence-based policies and interventions that promote a more equitable and inclusive early childhood education system.

This essential research can help raise awareness among childcare providers, educators, and policymakers about the extent of the problem and its far-reaching consequences. By casting light on these underlying disparities, equity advocates can work collectively to dismantle the biases, racism, or cultural incompetence and implement practices that ensure every child, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, can access quality child care without the fear of unwarranted expulsion or suspension based on race, gender, or disability. Investing in research on this critical issue is an essential step toward creating a more just and equitable childcare system in Pennsylvania and beyond.

Studies have shown that in Pennsylvania, early childhood teachers on average make less than \$13 an hour, and ECE programs that accept the Child Care Work (CCW) subsidy are reimbursed at the 60th percentile rate. Neither reflects the true cost of living nor the true cost of high-quality care and early education. The inequitable compensation for educators and providers exacerbates the staffing crisis.

With the staffing shortage and having to operate on a razor-thin budget, ECE providers are ill-equipped to meet the needs of children with challenging behaviors. For example, providers shoulder the financial burden when programs need to staff additional teachers due to challenging behaviors. If the program can secure additional staff, the poor compensation not only causes workforce retention problems but also the inability to attract highly qualified educators with knowledge and experience in managing classrooms with children with challenging behaviors.

The effort to reduce suspension and expulsion in ECE settings must include support for teachers in the classroom, professional development opportunities for teachers, and additional financial investment for the ECE profession and early intervention services. When all these resources are made available to the ECE workforce, every child, particularly boys and Black and Brown children, will have equitable access to high-quality early childhood education in a nourishing environment, and be equipped to thrive in kindergarten and beyond! (Sources: <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/01/SEDisability-report.pdf> <https://scholars.org/contribution/why-ending-expulsions-us-preschools-requires-more-passing-laws-ban-them>)

Recommendations on Providing Resources/Funding to Implement Equity Practices.

Implement Funding and Equity Practices - The Racial Equity Subcommittee recommends for ECE stakeholders, including but not limited to policymakers, resources and funding so providers can implement equity practices per regulations, policies, and performance standards set by federal, state, and city streams. The efforts to make positive impacts on children and families through providing developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate educational experience falls short of its promise when funding for early childhood education providers does not reflect the true cost of quality care nor recognize the expertise and administrative needs and costs associated with the implementation of equity practices. Families and providers are forced to absorb the costs of equity efforts to overcome language barriers (written translation and verbal interpretation), hiring bilingual staff to reflect the population served, highly skilled staff to improve family engagement and outreach to immigrant communities and low-income communities, extra staffing for children with special needs, trauma-informed and cultural competency professional development, etc. if they have the capacity.

As we strive for inclusivity and equity in our society, it's crucial to recognize and address the unique needs of children with special needs so they thrive. We firmly believe that every child, regardless of their abilities or challenges, deserves access to high-quality care and education tailored to their individual needs. Therefore, we advocate for increased rates for children with special needs in childcare programs to ensure equitable access to specialized services.

Why increased rates are essential:

1. Specialized Staffing and Training - Children with special needs often require additional support from highly trained professionals. Increased rates would enable childcare programs to hire specialized staff and provide ongoing training to ensure they can meet the unique needs of each individual child effectively.

2. Adapted Facilities and Resources - Creating an inclusive environment for children with special needs and removing barriers may require modifications/adaptations to facilities and the purchase of specialized resources and equipment to ensure their accessibility. Increased rates would provide childcare programs with the necessary resources to make these accommodations, ensuring that all children can fully participate and benefit from the program.

A few examples are:

- a. Adapted handles on doors, cubbies/coat racks.
- b. Alternative seating options.
- c. Light fixtures in classrooms should have the ability to adjust the lighting (brightening or dimming) to help children with autism or some form of visual impairment.
- d. Adapted furniture, such as lowered chairs and slant boards for writing support.

3. Enhanced Program Quality - By investing in specialized services for children with special needs, childcare programs can elevate the overall quality of care and education they provide. Increased rates would enable programs to offer a more comprehensive range of services, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where all children can thrive.



Mental health support in education with transparency - Addressing the funding deficit for early childhood programs in Pennsylvania requires a comprehensive strategy that acknowledges the importance of mental and behavioral health services for children and youth. Some potential solutions include:

1. Increased State Funding: Advocate for increased state funding specifically earmarked for early childhood mental and behavioral health services. Pennsylvania's government could allocate additional resources to support early intervention programs, ensuring that they adequately address the growing need for mental health support among children and youth.

- a. 2024-2025 Proposed PA Budget - Total Appropriation of \$202.20 million - Early Intervention Birth-3 (serve an estimated 54, 200 children)
- b. Total Appropriation of \$373.89 million - Early Intervention 3-5 (serve an estimated 69,800 children)

Just as \$100 million was allocated for mental health funding for K-12 schools, we recommend equal funding for children in early childhood programs who are experiencing mental health challenges. Also, with the \$20 million dollars of increased funding for community-based mental health services, we recommend the expansion of insurance acceptance from other insurance carriers. This will help remove the barrier of community-based mental health only accepting Medicaid.

2. Rapid Response Team Pilot Program: Implement and expand initiatives like the Rapid Response Team (RRT) pilot program by PAKeys to provide immediate support and intervention for children experiencing mental health crises. For the RRT pilot, \$200,000 was awarded to grantees. This program, which involves collaboration between early childhood programs and mental health professionals, can help address urgent needs while also informing broader strategies for early intervention and support. We recommend that a line item should be included in the annual state budget to ensure funding is available for the continued implementation of supportive services to help children statewide in an appropriate time frame. Based on the collection of data, this amount may need to be increased to enhance the service delivery.

3. Community Engagement and Education: Engage communities, parents, educators, and healthcare professionals in discussions about the importance of early childhood mental health and the need for increased funding. Education campaigns can raise awareness, reduce stigma, and mobilize support for policy changes and funding initiatives.

4. Transparency in Resource Allocation: Establish transparent mechanisms for resource allocation, including clear guidelines, reporting requirements, and stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes. This ensures that funding is distributed equitably and efficiently across early childhood programs based on identified needs and priorities.

a. Effective Resource Allocation: Financial accountability ensures that funds allocated for mental and behavioral health services are utilized efficiently to meet the diverse needs of children in early childhood programs. Transparent budgeting and expenditure tracking facilitate optimal resource allocation, enabling targeted interventions that maximize positive outcomes for children's mental health.

b. Preventing Misuse of Funds: Transparent financial practices act as a bulwark against potential misuse, safeguarding the integrity of mental and behavioral health services. Clear guidelines and oversight mechanisms mitigate the risk of funds being diverted or misappropriated, preserving resources for their intended purpose and maintaining public trust.



Mental health support in education requires addressing the funding deficit for early childhood programs in Pennsylvania and acknowledging the importance of mental and behavioral health services for children and youth



c. Enhancing Service Quality: Transparent financial reporting enables stakeholders to assess the effectiveness and impact of mental and behavioral health services provided to children. By scrutinizing expenditure patterns and outcomes, policymakers can identify areas for improvement and allocate resources strategically to enhance service quality and efficacy.

d. Promoting Stakeholder Confidence: Transparency fosters trust and confidence among stakeholders, including parents, caregivers, policymakers, and the community at large. Open communication about budget allocations, expenditure details, and service outcomes instills confidence in the accountability and stewardship of public funds, promoting greater engagement and support for mental and behavioral health initiatives.

5. Evaluation and Monitoring Systems: Develop robust evaluation and monitoring systems to assess the impact of funded programs and identify areas for improvement. Regular evaluations can inform funding decisions, allocate resources effectively, and ensure that early intervention services meet the evolving needs of Pennsylvania children and families

a. Establish Comprehensive Reporting Protocols: Develop standardized reporting protocols that outline the detailed allocation and utilization of funds for mental and behavioral health services in early childhood programs. These protocols should include clear line-item budgets, expenditure breakdowns, and regular financial updates to ensure transparency and accountability.

b. Implement Real-Time Monitoring Systems: Utilize technology-enabled monitoring systems to track expenditures and outcomes in real time, providing stakeholders with up-to-date information on the utilization of funds and the delivery of services. These systems enhance transparency by enabling timely oversight and intervention to address any discrepancies or inefficiencies.

c. Enhance Accessibility of Financial Information: Make financial information accessible to all stakeholders through user-friendly platforms, including online portals and public reports. Ensure that parents, caregivers, and the broader community have easy access to budgetary details, expenditure reports, and service performance metrics to promote transparency and informed decision-making.

d. Promote Stakeholder Engagement: Encourage active participation and feedback from stakeholders in the budgeting and decision-making processes related to mental and behavioral health services in early childhood programs. Foster collaboration between parents, caregivers, educators, policymakers, and service providers to ensure that financial decisions align with the needs and priorities of children and families.

By implementing these solutions, Pennsylvania can work towards ensuring that early childhood programs have the necessary resources to provide early intervention needs and educational supports for children’s mental and behavioral health. These strategies promote transparency, accountability, and collaboration among stakeholders to address the growing demand for mental health services among children and youth in the state. Early childhood programs serve as crucial platforms for nurturing the holistic development of children, including their mental and behavioral well-being. It is imperative to ensure financial accountability and transparency in the allocation and utilization of funds earmarked for mental and behavioral health services within these programs. This policy brief underscores the importance of financial accountability and transparency for children receiving mental and behavioral health services in early childhood programs and provides actionable recommendations to enhance these aspects.

(Sources: RCPA Early Intervention Steering Committee Position Paper: rcpa.net. PAKeys Rapid Response Team Pilot Program: pakeys.org <https://dced.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-shapiro-unveils-2024-25-budget-proposal-to-get-stuff-done-create-opportunity-and-advance-real-freedom-for-all-pennsylvanians/#:~:text=The%202024%2D25%20budget%20calls,repair%20projects%20in%20school%20buildings.>)

Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood Settings - It has been observed that even in the nurturing and formative environment of the early childhood education classroom, disparities exist in how discipline is applied, disproportionately affecting Brown and Black children, as well as children with disabilities. To address this problem effectively, a comprehensive examination of the root causes and underlying biases is paramount.

The Voice of ECE is an advocacy organization who collaboratively works towards an equitable and sustainable early learning system that promotes positive outcomes for children and supports the workforce behind the workforce - our early childhood educators. As advocates for the ECE sector, members of The Voice of ECE engaged in extensive discussions, town halls, and legislative hearings regarding the topic of challenging behaviors in early childhood programs. It is estimated that 10% to 15% of young children have mild to moderate behavior problems while, in a pediatric population, 21% of preschool children met the criteria for a diagnosable disorder, with 9% classified as severe.

Early childhood education providers and families are finding it difficult to navigate the complex system of behavioral or early intervention supports at both the city and state levels when trying to get the necessary help for children who are displaying some form of challenging behaviors in the classroom because they are separate systems. (Source: Powell, Dunlap & Fox, 2006)

Addressing challenging behaviors in early childhood settings is a critical endeavor that demands our utmost attention and dedication.



These challenging behaviors, which can manifest in various forms such as elopement, physical or verbal aggression, or self-injurious behaviors, pose significant barriers to the optimal development of young children. It is imperative to recognize that these behaviors are not merely isolated incidents, but rather complex issues deeply rooted in individual circumstances and environments.

However, it is disheartening to witness how these issues are often treated within silos of different agencies and organizations. The absence of a unified approach not only hinders progress but also perpetuates gaps in understanding and support for educators and families alike, especially for our most vulnerable population – our young children.

It is high time we establish an Early Childhood Education Behavioral Health Oversight Committee composed of experts from diverse fields who can collaborate on addressing this complex issue comprehensively.

Recommendations on Improving Suspension and Expulsion outcomes in Early Childhood Settings:

1. Comprehensive Training and Professional Development - Ensure that early childhood educators receive comprehensive training and ongoing professional development in behavior management strategies, positive reinforcement techniques, trauma-informed care, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Equip educators with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively support children with challenging behaviors while respecting their rights and individual needs.

2. Family Rights and Legal Advocacy - Educate families about their rights under IDEA and other relevant laws pertaining to early childhood education. Provide access to legal advocacy services and resources to empower families to advocate for their children’s rights and receive appropriate support and accommodations in early childhood programs. Collaborate with lawyers and legal experts to provide guidance and assistance to families navigating the legal landscape.

3. Collaborative Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement - Foster collaborative partnerships and engage stakeholders from across the ECE sector, including educators, administrators, families, mental health professionals, and policymakers.

Convene town halls, roundtable discussions, and working groups to facilitate dialogue, share best practices, and develop collective solutions to address challenging behaviors in early childhood programs.



4. Policy Advocacy and Legislative Action - Advocate for policies and legislative initiatives that prioritize early childhood mental health, behavior support services, and inclusive practices in early childhood programs. Testify at legislative hearings, engage with state legislators, and mobilize grassroots advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the importance of addressing challenging behaviors and securing adequate resources and support.

5. Research and Data-Informed Practices - Invest in research initiatives and data collection efforts to better understand the prevalence and impact of challenging behaviors in early childhood programs. Use data-driven approaches to inform decision-making, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and identify areas for improvement. Promote the use of evidence-based practices and interventions that have been shown to be effective in addressing challenging behaviors.

6. Culturally Responsive and Trauma-Informed Practices - Promote culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices in early childhood programs to support the diverse needs and experiences of children and families. Provide training and resources on recognizing and addressing trauma, creating safe and supportive environments, and building positive relationships with children and families from diverse backgrounds. By implementing these recommendations and prioritizing collaboration, advocacy, and evidence-based practices, we can work together to create nurturing and inclusive early childhood programs that support the social, emotional, and behavioral development of all children.

By fostering collaboration among early childhood education providers, behavioral health providers, OCDEL (Office of Child Development and Early Learning), Bureau of Early Intervention Services & Family Supports, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), Early Intervention Technical Assistance (EITA), Infant Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH), Health Care Insurance providers, Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRC), Public Health Management Corporation, CHOP policy lab, psychologists, pediatricians, social workers, families, and other relevant professionals, we can create evidence-based strategies tailored to the unique needs of each child.

With such a passionate commitment towards addressing these challenges collectively, we can create a system of shared supports to ensure every child thrives without limitations or barriers hindering their growth during these critical early years and become productive members of society and teachers have the resources to support them.



It is high time we establish an Early Childhood Education Behavioral Health Oversight Committee composed of experts from diverse fields who can collaborate on addressing this complex issue comprehensively.



Priority 3 - Enhancing Equity in Business Practices through Professional Development and General Workplace Reform.

Problem 1 - Black and Brown Leadership Underrepresentation: Black and Brown leadership is underrepresented in the field of education, according to research. As a result, Pennsylvania's ECE governance system lacks cultural diversity and equal representation as well as equitable hiring policies. (Source: <https://mccormickcenter.nl.edu/library/research-brief-2206/>)

It is widely reported that Black and Brown leaders are lacking in the early childhood education sector. However, the Racial Equity Subcommittee contends that the primary reason for their lack of representation in key leadership positions is the lack of opportunities and/or hiring of Black and Brown leaders to leadership positions. (Source: <https://www.marylandphilanthropy.org/sites/default/files/EYLDI%20Report%2010.31.21.pdf>)



Problem 2 - General business practices are causing undue burdens on families of children receiving care, especially children from low-income families. Low-income workers are forced to work unpredictable shifts, which affects the stability of care that children need to thrive and learn. Additionally, low-income families often work multiple jobs or take jobs with long commutes as their only employment options. Due to this, families' routines are disrupted, and children spend a lot of time cared for by others and/or do not have a consistent sleep schedule. It is not uncommon for children to not interact with their parents for days on end. The impact of long work hours and commute times on families living in poverty can be detrimental and cause increased behavior issues in children; with higher incidents seen in boys. Working long hours and the decrease in spending quality family time together creates additional stress on families struggling under the weight of inequitable business practices. In addition to straining and eroding family relationships, these business practices do not provide a living wage. This, in turn, affects family outcomes which directly affects child care programs.

According to a report conducted by the Urban Institute, it found that employer assistance in covering child care expenses is significantly rare, creating a substantial gap that public policy (i.e. public assistance) needs to address. This trend is consistent across various socioeconomic groups of working parents but impacts low-income families more significantly. They found that employers generally see child care as a societal issue better managed by public policy. (Source: https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/101144/parents_access_to_work-family_supports_1.pdf and <https://ifstudies.org/blog/measuring-the-long-term-effects-of-early-extensive-day-care>)

Recommendations Enhancing Equity in Business and Education Practices:

The Racial Equity subcommittee recommends prioritizing equity for business and education practices. This includes equitable funding for businesses, diverse representation and voice in the business community, and equitable opportunities for professional development. Public investment in high-quality early childhood programs is essential to supporting economic growth and embedding equitable policies and practices within the ECE system after many years of policies that failed to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As a result, all businesses will thrive, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, etc. Reforming program policies is imperative, in order to diversify representation and make professional development accessible to all people, including English Language Learners. Apart from this reform, Child Development Associate (CDA) programs, professional development opportunities, and policies should be translated into a variety of languages to ensure educational growth in the early childhood sector. Research shows that children of all racial backgrounds benefit from having diverse educators. As early as toddler and preschool ages, children begin to recognize social categories such as race and class. To help children develop positive perceptions and minimize racial bias, it is essential for them to have early interactions with individuals from various backgrounds. Moreover, it is important for children to see their adult caregivers respected and valued, which includes observing people of color in leadership and management roles within early childhood environments. This shift is essential to counter the tendency to concentrate people of color in lower-level positions, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for everyone.

Parents require work-family supports for various reasons that are often not considered in major public policy discussions. It is vital that we continue the debate on how employers and public policies can be utilized to provide stability for all children and families. This includes a broader discussion on leave policies, workplace flexibility, sick pay, and alternative work arrangements to help parents maintain employment while effectively caring for their children. Financial assistance from employers for child care is notably less common, or even nonexistent, than other work supports and benefits, leaving a significant gap for public policy (i.e. public assistance) to address. There should be a push for greater employer accountability in investing in healthy families and future citizens. Thus, this committee recommends strengthening and building the relationship between child care providers and business employers to achieve this goal.

To further strengthen and protect single parents who earn up to 300% of the federal poverty level, the Racial Equity Subcommittee recommends the following additional measures:

- + “All businesses must define a full-time workday as no more than six hours a day for single head-of-household families with children under five. *(Source: https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/101116/balancing_work_with_school_and_training_while_raising_young_children_1.pdf).*
- + Recommending that all businesses develop a consistent shift for single-headed families who have children under the age of six.

Glossary

OCDEL - Office of Child Development and Early Learning focuses on creating opportunities for the Commonwealth's youngest children to develop and learn to their fullest potential. This goal is accomplished through a framework of supports and systems that help ensure that children and their families have access to high-quality services. OCDEL is jointly overseen by the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education.

PKC - Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts provides high-quality pre-kindergarten services to at-risk three- and four-year olds at no cost to families. Children living in families earning up to 300% of the federal poverty level are eligible to apply. Pre-K Counts is offered in school districts, Keystone STARS 3 and 4 child care programs, Head Start programs, and licensed nursery schools.

HSSAP - Pennsylvania's Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program provides state funding to Head Start programs that serve three- and four-year olds living in families at or below 100% of the federal poverty level. The program is offered to eligible families at no cost. The programs provide comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services aligned to the federal program requirements.

CCW - The Child Care Works program is designed to enable low-income families to maintain employment while ensuring children receive high-quality child care. The Child Care Works program is a non-entitlement benefit made available through Federal and State funds. Eligible families are assessed a family co-payment based on their income and family size. Through Child Care Works, families have access to quality care programs that may otherwise be out of their reach.

PHLpre-K - Philadelphia PreK offers free, quality pre-k to children ages 3–4 across Philadelphia. This program is funded by the Philadelphia Beverage Tax proposed by Mayor Kenney and passed by City Council in 2016. Since 2017, PHLpreK has served over 13,000 children. PHLpreK is now offering 4,300 children free, quality pre-k during the 2022–2023 school year. To achieve this, they partner with more than 180 early childhood education providers.

CDA - The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential is the most widely recognized credential in early childhood education (ECE) and is a key stepping stone on the path of career advancement in ECE. The CDA Credential is based on a core set of competency standards, which guide ECE professionals as they work toward becoming qualified teachers of young children. There are four credentials offered: Infant -Toddler (birth to 36 months), preschool (three to five years), home-based Family Child Care (birth to five years), and Home Visitor (families of children birth to age five). Obtaining a CDA is a big commitment, but one that creates confident early childhood educators with command of today's best practices for teaching young children.

ECE - Early Childhood Education refers to formal and informal educational programs that guide the growth and development of children throughout their preschool years (birth to age five).

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Children First, formerly known as Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), serves as the leading child advocacy organization improving the lives and life chances of children in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Children First undertakes specific and focused projects in areas affecting the healthy growth and development of children, including child care, public education, child health, juvenile justice, and child welfare.

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Through thoughtful and informed advocacy, community education, targeted service projects, and budget analysis, Children First watches out and speaks out for children and families.

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