



To: President-elect Biden's Transition Team

From: The Education Trust, National Center for Learning Disabilities, National Urban League, and UnidosUS

Subject: Advancing early learning equity for young children of color through the Biden administration

Date: January 15, 2021

President-elect Biden has the opportunity to make early childhood education (ECE) significantly more equitable for young children of color across the country. Racial inequities within our ECE system begin before children [enter kindergarten](#), and even when families of color have access to early care and learning, the cost — which may take up to [116%](#) of a low-income family's household income — is often prohibitive; [Black families spend 13.6% of their monthly income on child care, and Latino families spend 14.9%](#). [Far too few Black and Latino children have access](#) to high-quality, state-funded preschool programs. Young children of color who do have access to ECE often face biased, harmful, and [ineffective](#) disciplinary practices resulting in the [disproportionate suspension and expulsion](#) of Black children from ECE programs. Correcting these inequities grows more urgent as the population of young children of color increases; for instance, [by 2060](#), Latino children will comprise 32% of the nation's preschool-age population. We recommend that the Biden administration take the following actions to advance early learning equity for young children of color:

COVID-19 Response

Early childhood education is facing an existential crisis in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Last April, [60% of child care providers](#), who are [disproportionately women of color](#), closed; and by July, 40% of programs [reported](#) that they are certain they would close permanently without public funding. [Half](#) of these programs have had to substantially raise their tuition rates for families, who are themselves struggling financially during this crisis. Only [6%](#) of child care businesses received Paycheck Protection Program loans, leaving the vast majority without financial support. As of December 2020, 1 in 4 child care centers and 1 in 3 family child care homes [reported](#) that if their enrollment does not increase and they do not receive sufficient funding, they will close within three months; and most child care programs owned by people of color — 51% — reported that they expect to close within three months. Significant funding is urgently required to stabilize ECE. We recommend the following actions:

- **We recommend that the Biden administration actively work with Congress to take the following legislative actions to stabilize ECE budgets and increase educational equity for young children most impacted by the pandemic:**
 - **Appropriate an additional \$40 billion to a stabilization fund for the child care industry. Appropriate an additional \$15 billion for the states through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) as outlined in the [Child Care Is Essential Act](#), the updated Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act, and the President-elect's [American Rescue Plan](#). The December 2020 [COVID-19 relief package](#) contains \$10 billion in CCDBG funds for this purpose, which falls far short of the amount necessary for supporting ECE providers and the families they serve.**

- **Include the ECE sector in all applicable recovery programs** as they are funded through various channels and will likely [not all be addressed](#) through one recovery program. Because ECE is provided in a wide variety of settings, all providers – including those in family child care homes – should be eligible for such recovery programs.
 - **Automatically enroll providers** in mortgage forbearance (with no interest, penalty or extension), rent deferrals/grants, and utility and insurance payment support throughout the public health crisis and through at least 60 days after the end of the crisis.
 - Allow any federal funding that states can use for [locally determined urgent needs](#) to be used for supporting child care providers.
- **Federal relief packages for states and school districts should set aside money specifically for serving children with disabilities, including those receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 619 of Part B, and Part C.** This funding should be explicitly used to address the likely **under-identification of [children with disabilities from birth to kindergarten](#) and insufficient delivery of services** to them during the pandemic, and should be used during school shutdowns and as traditional in-person special education and related services begin to resume (for instance, in January 2021 through August 2021). States must use a portion of this federal funding to support the following:
 - **Child Find activities** for children who are potentially eligible for services under IDEA Part B, Section 619, or Part C;
 - Staffing for increased service delivery to provide **compensatory special education** and related services, including increased capacity for an extended school year (ESY);
 - **Professional development for all elementary school teachers, including general education teachers**, on identifying disabilities and using referral processes, including training on culturally and linguistically competent practices and family engagement;
 - Funding for IDEA Part B, Section 619, and Part C **technical assistance** (for instance, through the [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)) to document and build upon lessons learned during the pandemic, and about the effects of the current crisis, in order to inform future responses to crises, including:
 - Publishing the state’s **monthly referral, evaluation, and service delivery data** throughout the pandemic, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, dual language learner status, limited English proficiency or home language status, income level, foster care status, and geographic location; including:
 - **rate of service delivery** for families already receiving services; rate of service delivery for families receiving services for the first time; and percentage of families who began receiving services for the first time out of all those found eligible for services;
 - **wait times between referral and evaluation, and evaluation and service delivery.**
 - Publishing **challenges and successes** of delivering Part B, Section 619, and Part C services during the pandemic and **recommendations** for the immediate future and for future crises and gathering feedback from the following people in the state:

- **Part C and Part B, Section 619 professionals** regarding their professional experiences throughout the pandemic, including challenges, successes, feedback on state guidance, and recommendations; and including feedback specific to serving families of color, low-income families, families of dual language learners, families with home languages other than English, children in foster care, and families across various geographical regions within the state.
- **Families receiving Part C and Part B, Section 619, services** during the pandemic, including families of color, low-income families, families of dual language learners, families with home languages other than English, foster families, and families in urban and rural areas.

BEYOND THESE EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE COVID-19 RESPONSE, THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S FIRST BUDGET PROPOSAL PRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE EARLY LEARNING EQUITY IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS LONG AFTER THE PANDEMIC:

Supporting More Equitable State Preschool Programs

Funding for state preschool programs has been [stagnant](#) in recent years. When states do fund high-quality preschool programs, access is more limited for [Black and Latino children, who are often underrepresented](#). During the campaign, President-elect Biden presented [a proposal](#) to work with states to provide high-quality, universal pre-kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds. To ensure this proposed investment supports early learning equity for young children of color, the President-elect should include the requirements outlined below in his first budget proposal. These requirements would apply to new funding through the increased Title I funding outlined in the President-elect's plan. The Biden administration should encourage states to supplement this funding by blending and braiding their other available federal, state, and local funding streams. The Biden administration should also work to incorporate these requirements into all existing ECE programs, across mixed delivery settings, in order to support equity for all young learners.

In order for states to receive the increased Title I funding for pre-kindergarten, as outlined in the President-elect's plan, state pre-kindergarten programs should be required to have the following 10 characteristics, which support equity for children of color and children from low-income families. States must provide a high-quality plan that demonstrates how they will be implemented within the funding period that includes a) baseline data demonstrating where the state stands now with regard to each of these 10 characteristics; and b) a method, measurement system, and timeline for achieving any characteristic not currently met by the state.

1. As state pre-kindergarten programs expand, states (including the District of Columbia and U.S. territories) must **prioritize expansion** through a mixed delivery system (including family child care homes, child care centers, Head Start programs, and public school settings) in areas with insufficient preschool and child care availability, high percentages of families of color and low-income families, or both.
 - Prioritized enrollment must go toward:

- Economically disadvantaged students;
 - Students from major racial/ethnic groups;
 - Children with disabilities as defined under IDEA;
 - Dual language learners;
 - Children living in foster care; and
 - Children from families experiencing homelessness.
2. Teachers in state preschool programs must receive at least **full compensation parity** with K-3 teachers in their district; compensation parity should likewise exist for assistant teachers and paraeducators and their counterparts in K-3.
 3. All preschool programs must use **inclusion models** to maximize the provision of the least restrictive environment (LRE) for children receiving services under IDEA.
 4. **Dual language immersion preschool programs** must be available in any school district in which at least 20% of students speak the same home language other than English; and enrollment should be [prioritized for dual language learners](#) of that home language.
 5. **Quality measurement systems** of preschool programs must define and measure quality in ways informed by early childhood professionals of color and multilingual early childhood professionals in the state and be supported by a culturally and linguistically competent research.
 6. Preschool programs must provide ongoing, culturally and linguistically competent **professional development** for all professionals in teaching roles, including assistant teachers and paraeducators, on evidence-based strategies for supporting positive behaviors, developmentally appropriate practice, child development (including social & emotional development), [screening and progress monitoring for students with learning and attention challenges](#), supporting language-rich environments, dual language learners, and collaborating with families.
 7. Preschool programs must **prohibit** the use of [corporal punishment, seclusion, suspension, and expulsion](#), and provide ongoing professional development, coaching, and consultation to all educators in **positive behavioral support models**, such as the [Pyramid Model](#).
 8. Preschool programs must provide **full-day programs** to all families who prefer them; and offer year-round schedules according to family preferences.
 9. States and districts must provide **easy, quick, accessible application processes** through multiple modes (e.g., online & smartphone adaptive/responsive, in-person, via phone call) in multiple languages. Enrollees should not be required to provide information about the citizenship status or immigration status of a child or family members.
 10. Programs must periodically **report data showing how they are addressing and making progress toward meeting the above requirements**, including data on meeting timelines and milestones for achieving each component of each requirement as outlined in each state's initial plan.

BEYOND A SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT TO EXPAND ACCESS TO PRE-K FOR ALL 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLDS, THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION CAN ADVANCE EARLY LEARNING EQUITY BY FOCUSING ON THE FOLLOWING KEY AREAS:

Significantly Increase Federal Funding for ECE

Early childhood education has long been severely underfunded, and that has disproportionately affected young children of color. The Biden administration should work with Congress to significantly increase funding for the following:

- **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).** While the December 2020 [COVID-19 relief package](#) includes an increase of \$135 million for Head Start/Early Head Start and \$85 million for the CCDBG from FY2020, these increases fall far short of those necessary to fully fund high-quality early care and education for eligible children. Moreover, states should be required to [set subsidy rates that reflect the true cost](#) of high-quality care.
- **Head Start and Early Head Start.** While the December 2020 [COVID-19 relief package](#) includes an increase of \$135 million for Head Start and Early Head Start, these increases fall [far short](#) of those necessary to [fully fund](#) these programs. These programs serve a large number of young children of color and their families. Nationwide, 27% of Head Start students are Latino and 30% are Black.
 - The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) program accommodates the needs of young children of farmworkers, the majority of whom are Latino. The Biden administration should call attention to the importance of the MSHS in supporting these families who are bolstering the nation's economy throughout the pandemic.
 - Funding should include targeted allocations for [digital literacy](#) and equity resources and training for staff and families of young children to access high-quality virtual ECE supports and to inform [developmentally appropriate practices regarding technology and interactive media in ECE](#). Any digital resources must be accessible to students and families not proficient in English, and students and families with disabilities.
- **Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)** in order to provide on-campus child care for the nearly 14 million undergraduate student parents.
- **Preschool Development Grants (PDG)**
- **[Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting \(MIECHV\)](#)**
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**
- And it should ensure that **full funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** includes Part B, Section 619, Part C, and Part D.
 - Part C should be used in part to support states building accessible developmental screening systems, outreach and awareness of developmental screening systems, and building a pipeline of diverse early intervention practitioners.
 - Part D funding increases should be used in part for monitoring, evaluation, and technical assistance regarding provision of least restrictive environment in preschool programs using data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, income level, and dual language learner status.

Ensuring Early Educator Diversity

In order to strengthen the pipeline of diverse early childhood education professionals, the Biden administration should work with Congress to do the following:

- Support **tuition-free and/or debt-free access to higher education** that covers added costs, such as travel, books, and substitutes for working educators, which will increase degree-attainment opportunities for people of color and multilingual people seeking ECE degrees.
- Fund **apprenticeship programs, Grow Your Own programs, and T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood and other comprehensive scholarship models** for early childhood educators, including early childhood special educators and early interventionists, with an emphasis on including historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), and minority-serving institutions (MSIs) to increase diversity in the educator workforce.
- Federal scholarships and loan forgiveness programs should be available to **early childhood educators from any early learning setting**, including school-based, home-based, and center-based settings.

Supporting Equity for Young Learners With Disabilities

In order to support early learning equity for young learners with developmental delays and disabilities, the Biden administration should do the following:

- Direct the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to submit an **annual report to Congress, states, and the public** on implementation of the [Equity in IDEA regulation](#) that includes state status and progress on racial disproportionality in identification, placement, and discipline of children with disabilities, disaggregated by IDEA disability category, gender, and dual language learner/English learner status.
- Direct ED to include **adherence to least restrictive environment (LRE)** in ECE settings as factors for state determinations in monitoring, including placement patterns in IDEA, Part B 619 services disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, dual language learner status, and IDEA disability category.
- Direct ED & HHS to **incentivize and monitor coordination efforts** between child care, early intervention, and preschool special education programs.

Making Data Accessible to Monitor Equity

In order to provide comprehensive, transparent data on early childhood education, which is critical to identifying and eradicating systemic inequities, the Biden administration should do the following:

- **ED** should continue to collect all preschool data from the **Civil Rights Data Collection** that was slated for removal under a proposal by the previous administration. Specifically, ED should retain the existing collection of preschool enrollment data, disaggregated by student group (race/ethnicity, IDEA, and English Learner), whether preschool children are subject to exclusionary discipline, and all information on the district's early childhood services and programs.
- **ED & HHS** should require states to **track and report racial disproportionality in harsh discipline practices** (corporal punishment, restraint and seclusion, and suspension and expulsion) in ECE programs, including those in school-based and community-based settings.

- **ED** should **disaggregate data collection under IDEA, Section 618**, so that **kindergarten** data can be analyzed separately from **preschool** data.
- Work with Congress to increase funding for **Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS) and Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS)**, and make it a grant requirement that systems include data disaggregation by race/ethnicity, family income level, dual language learner/English learner status, and IDEA status (including IDEA disability category). This should include funding for training all stakeholders providing ECE-related data.

Improving ECE Quality Across Programs

Quality is a critical element in ensuring the lasting impact of ECE on a student's life. To equitably and effectively define and measure quality in ECE, the administration should dedicate resources to clearly defining quality through culturally and linguistically diverse input and research, and do the following:

- The Biden administration's plan to double the number of **mental health professionals** in schools should include such professionals in federally funded state preschool programs and should provide increased [early childhood mental health consultation](#) to families and to community-based early care and learning providers. Mental health professionals working in schools must receive ongoing professional development in evidence-based, culturally and linguistically competent practices.
- **Quality standards and accountability systems** for any early care and learning program receiving federal funding, whether school-based or community-based, whether in a school, center, or home-based setting, should [define and measure quality](#) in ways informed by early childhood professionals of color and multilingual early childhood professionals in the state, including professionals from home-based and community-based early care and learning settings, and be supported by a culturally and linguistically competent evidence base.

Guidance from ED & HHS

The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Health and Human Services agencies should provide joint guidance on the following areas that affect equity in early childhood education:

- Blending and braiding federal, state, and local funding streams to supplement federal funding for state preschool programs in order to provide free comprehensive, culturally and linguistically competent supports to 3- and 4-year-olds.
- Monitoring & eliminating any policies that disproportionately harm young children of color including corporal punishment, restraint and seclusion, and suspension and expulsion.
- How to use funding from Titles I, II, III, and IV of ESSA to provide ECE supports for children from birth to school entry, including through two-generation approaches; comprehensive services such as health care, mental health services, nutrition, dental and vision exams, home visiting programs, and transportation; screening and developmental assessment; professional development; and coordination with state and local agencies administering early learning programs.
- How to use funding from Title I, Title II, and Title IV of ESSA, the Child Care and Development Block Grant's quality set aside, Head Start technical assistance, and other applicable funding streams to reduce [harsh discipline and disparities](#), with an emphasis on culturally and linguistically competent prevention, intervention, professional development, data infrastructure, and family engagement.

- Reissuing ECE disciplinary guidelines across mixed delivery settings that addresses the following in a culturally and linguistically competent manner: (1) calls for the elimination of zero-tolerance policies, corporal punishment, suspension, expulsion, restraint, and seclusion; (2) offers best practices in eliminating gender, disability-related, and racial disparities in ECE discipline including through positive behavioral support and trauma-informed practices; and (3) provides best practices to actively engage community members in decisions.
- How best to ensure quality standards for ECE are culturally and linguistically competent, including detailing how to design standards with input from people of color and multilingual people.
- How to address desegregation strategies for ECE settings, given that ECE is [more segregated](#) than any other school level, as part of the Biden administration's plan to reinstate guidance on diversifying schools.
- Best practices for culturally and linguistically competent early screening and intervention to identify and support students with risk factors for challenges in reading, writing, math, and attention.

The U.S. Department of Education, through a re-established Office of Early Learning, should provide guidance on the following areas that affect equity in early childhood education:

- How best to invest Title III funds to promote research-based dual language immersion models for dual language learners in ECE.
- Increasing diversity for early childhood educators via teacher quality programs in HEA Title II, federal student aid programs authorized in Title IV, and requiring competence in areas of dual language learners, screening and evaluation of disabilities, inclusion of students with disabilities, and culturally and linguistically competent family engagement.
- The establishment of a [White House Office on Children and Youth and a White House Conference on Children and Youth](#) to focus on research, policy recommendations, federal programs, and federal investment strategies to optimize the healthy development of all children in the U.S.