

(Re)Conceptualizing Current Measurements of Accessibility for Black Children & Families

Ashley Watts - August 2023

Marymount University, Arizona State University

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

First and foremost, this resource was created with the hopes that Black children and families experiencing anti-Black oppression and trauma due to the inaccessibility of vital resources feel seen, heard, and supported.

Additionally, there is the goal of providing a comprehensive analysis of accessibility to quality early care and educational programs for Black children and families on a national scale. While access has been defined through the indicators discussed in this resource determined through pre-existing research, following measures for conceptualization, such efforts remain exclusive to Black children & families. And finally, with this resource, we aim to reconceptualize the pre-determined indicators that were measured that do not include Black children and families, to provide recommendations on what policymakers should do to intentionally acknowledge the current challenges that we face and remedy this ongoing issue.

While we recognize that childcare across the nation is in the face of crisis, we also recognize that specific groups have always been in a state of crisis regarding quality care and education. Black children and families have been the brunt of a long-standing system of injustice and barricades to vital resources. Now more than ever, it is important to reimagine early education through the lens of equity and social justice.

Early education is a well-established system of racist practices that cater to one type of family demographic. We know through learned lessons and research how important early education is to children, as well, as the role family structure plays in the development of young children. We uplift a system that centers both children and families through an equity and intersectional lens if the true objective is to see children thrive by the time, they are school-ready. This reimagined opportunity puts forth our ideal system that takes into account family perspectives and intentional restorative measures.

Systems of care across all modalities are struggling to provide for children, and succinctly, families are struggling to afford care. And while we acknowledge that these struggles existed long before COVID-19, they certainly have worsened since then, making access to quality care nearly impossible for certain groups. We ask that policymakers, thought leaders, and changemakers, acknowledge that early care and education is not one-size-fits-all and that Black people, furthermore, are not one-size fits all and the important role of intersectionality when achieving equity.

To achieve a reimagined space of early childhood education that leads through an intersectional and equity lens, we must be intentional and specific about the individual needs of children and families. This report and toolkit sheds light on the specific

structural barriers we must dismantle to take the necessary steps to include Black children and families from all backgrounds explicitly.

Overview

I. Critical Junctures of Black Children & Families in Early Childhood

Over the past decade large strides have been made in the effort and research of early childhood development and education; however, these efforts have continued to reveal inequitable access to early childhood education for Black children and families. Despite the many efforts of the federal government through programs such as Head Start and the Child Care Development Block Grant, roughly 50% of Black children remain without care and access to high-quality early education¹. The lack of equitable access to quality early education for Black children has impacted Black parents' ability to work and/or attend school² and overall diminishes the well-being of Black families and their children.

Among the many barriers that hinder equitable access to early care and education are the deeply rooted biases and anti-black systemic practices such as segregation, concentrated poverty, zoning, gerrymandering, and gentrification, that leave Black Americans fighting to receive fair treatment in the workplace, housing, and healthcare. Education is impacted by these practices and in return impacts educational systems and the outcomes of students, particularly Black children. Understanding the relationship between social indicators and student success requires us to recognize not only the intersectionality of many barriers, but also the substantial role they play in high-quality ECE experiences.

Family structure plays a large role in understanding the weight external factors play in the social standing for Black families. The dynamic of families has moved from the nuclear image idolized in the 1960s to predominantly single parenthood where mothers are largely the “breadwinners”. The shift in family structure directly relates to both employment and income as financial structure can strain access to vital resources and services designed to augment the development for young children. The social structure

¹ Smith, P. (2021) Beyond Anti-Blackness in Bilingual Education: Looking through the Lens of Black Immigrant Subject.

² Lloyd, C. Alvira-Hammond, M. Carlson, J., Logan, D. (2021, March 5). Family, Economic, and Geographic Characteristics of Black Families with Children. Child Trends

of Black families shifting to non-nuclear is a direct result of the systemic practices and anti-blackness rooted in American history. For centuries Black Americans had to undergo harsh practices, such as slavery and sharecropping, that would ultimately leave such minority groups oppressed and likely to struggle finding resources for health, education, and many other societal necessities. ⁴

As a long-term effect, many families struggle to make ends meet or not meet their needs at all. Poverty and low-income households largely have always affected minorities unjustly and with discrepancies. Of the 4.2 million children under the age of 5 living in poverty in 2015, 39% are Black and 62.4% are living in households that are 200 percent of the federal poverty level and deemed low-income. ⁵ While the importance of early learning and care is widely known, the direct correlation of high-quality care to individual achievement levels and long-term socioeconomic attainment, disparity gaps remain a concern and permeate Black children.

Drawing from the 2023 Committee on Exploring Opportunities Gaps, ECE experts on a panel outline the effects the lack of access to crucial resources and opportunities in relation to such social factors, and strategies to close these gaps. The opportunity gap that young Black children and their families face ultimately impacts their ability and likelihood to not only achieve but promote health consequences and “contribute to health disparities”. ⁶ Their report found six conclusions that drive opportunity gaps:

1. A child’s upbringing and lack of accessibility to resources and basic needs can result in long-term gaps in education, physical, and mental health.
2. Health is one of many policies and practices that can reduce opportunity gaps; however, both inconsistency and unaligned implementation creates negative long-term barriers.
3. The administration of such policies adds to the differential experiences that families undergo including eligibility criteria at the state and local level, and the difficulties of enrollment. This barrier is even more extensive to families of color that are ELLs.
4. Accessibility to employee benefits such as, family leave, PTO, childcare or employment security, hinders families’ quality of life.
5. Opportunity gaps correlate to socio-economic factors including but not limited to, income, race/ethnicity, social class, gender, or language; all of which often intersect and make up marginalized groups.

³

⁴ Iruka, I., Curenton, S., (2014). The CRAF-E4 Family Engagement Model. Academic Press

⁵ Johnson-Staub, C. (2017, December). Equity Start Early: Addressing Racial Inequities in Child Care and Early Education Policy (Executive Summary) CLASP

⁶ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. Closing the Opportunity Gap for Young Children

6. Structural racism and systemic exclusion lead to inequalities in the distribution of resources and services that are vital to families in need. This administration burden in return, affects how families experience opportunities.

The committee of experts concludes by highlighting the reality of the inequities in early learning systems that “underinvestment of ECE (and in its workforce) reflects a deeply racialized history”. Furthermore, accessibility is hindered by state and federal policies and creates experiential gaps, which are often low-quality for people of color. Opportunity gaps act as evidence that here in the United States, Black children and families face unnecessary barriers to receiving not only economic provisions, but the societal attainment to promote overall well-being and the ability to thrive. Ultimately, it is social indicators such as race, that determine the availability of vital resources and tools that need to be readily accessible to children and families of all backgrounds.

Based on the current analysis of income and employment, and as previously indicated, the consensus of economic stances of Black families are at the core of unjust treatment at the workplace and as a result, ramifications illustrate the following:

- Black families are subject to experiencing more disruptions in employment and greater job insecurities.
- Substantially, Black Americans frequently experience undercompensation.
- When compared to White families, Black families largely have little to no assets, employee benefits or economic cushions.⁷

Nonetheless, Black families are greatly impacted by the double-barreled reality of inability to access vital necessities such as quality childcare to secure employment and once employed, the lack of access to benefits necessary for the well-being of their families.

Significance of Historical Policies Overview

The dialogue of prejudices and segregation has been a long-standing practice, including the development of the early childhood space. Historically educational systems, including early learning centers and childcare have been segregated and made availability for children of color scarce. Childcare was built on the enslavement of Black

⁷ Joint Economic Committee. (2020). The Economic State of Black America in 2020; Lloyd, C., Alvira-Hammond, M., Carlson, J., & Logan D. (2021, March 5). Family, Economic, and Geographic Characteristics of Black Families with Children. Child Trends; Hamilton, D., Darity, W., Anne, E., Price, V., Sridharan, R., & Tippett. (2015). Umbrellas Don't Make it Rain: Why Studying and Working Hard isn't Enough for Black Americans.

women pre-civil war and post-civil war as the bulk of domestic work including childcare was assumed by Black women at low unfair compensation, despite tactical systemic policies such as the 1938 Fair Labor Standard Act, which excluded domestic workers⁸. When policies were developed to aid children and families both Black and White, reauthorizations and revisions would make eligibility requirements and funding limited to white families. The following, while not listing all national policies pertaining to childcare and families, provides a brief overview of policies that have hindered the care and education for Black children and families across the nation.

During the Jim Crow Era of the late 1800s to 1950s, laws were enforced to segregate and alienate Black persons. Black children were legally segregated, including young children who attended early learning schools readily made available by pioneers such as Betsey Stockton⁹ and Dr. Mamie Phillips Clarke.¹⁰

Black women were accustomed to providing care for White families and contributed greatly to the foundation for early care and education as frequently employed by day nurseries. However, Black children were less likely to be accepted in such programs than White children.¹¹

In the decades that followed, Black families continued to be discriminated against and excluded in the wake of policies that were designed to aid families, in critical times such as World War II. This historical overview is a part of the research and policy analysis provided by Child Trends. In summary, policies that were implemented in the 1940s and 70s, such as the Lanham Act of 1941, the Comprehensive Child Care Act, and the Head Start Act of 1964¹² were created with the intention of providing childcare centers were needed, however, were left to the interpretation and implementation of the states. As a result, many Black families, especially in the South, often were the most impacted.

In the wake of the 1970s and 80s, many advocacy efforts were birthed to confront racism and gender discrimination. The report reviewed policies such as the Act for Better Child Care, the Military Child Care Act of 1989, and the Child Care Development Block Grant. All of which positioned equity advocacy efforts at the front and center for young children and their families. By 2020 COVID-19 presented unimaginable harm to the ECE workforce and system as many centers closed, employees were laid off and discrimination accelerated. The work of advocacy and policymaking took off as those

⁸ Schilder, D., & Curenton, S. (2021, January 29). Policymakers Can Redesign the Early Childhood Education System to Root Out Structural Racism. Urban Institute.

⁹ Prochner, L. (2019, July). Betsey Stockton, Pioneer Early Childhood Teacher. NAEYC. www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/jul2019/betsey-stockton-early-childhood-teacher

¹⁰ Jepkimboi, G., Monhan, A., McFadyen Christensen, L. (2020, July). Our Proud Heritage. Understanding Children's Sense of Identity: The Life and Work of Dr. Mamie Phipps Clark (1917-1983). NAEYC. www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/jul2020/our-proud-heritage

¹¹ Williams, R. (2022, September 15). Uncovering the Role of Early Childhood in Black Women's Clubs Work Towards Racial and Gender Justice. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, UC Berkeley

¹² Lloyd, C., Carlson, J., Barnett, H., Shaw, S., & Logan, D. (2021). Mary Pauper: A Historical Exploration of Early Care and Education, Compensation, Policy, and Solutions

from the field, alongside families, and other advocates, demanded solutions¹³

Today, many Black Americans face a similar struggle, the lack of accessibility to care for their children, which impacts work and/or education security, as well as remain an inaccessible employee benefit. In 2022, a study revealed that student-parents, largely Black fathers, struggle to meet insecurities and find support.¹⁴ Student parents are at risk for affordability gaps, or the amount of cost student parents from low-income backgrounds pay for college, in addition to childcare, minus scholarships and grants. Ultimately, Black families from various backgrounds share the commonality of inaccessibility to quality care for their children.

II. Definitions of Access in Early Learning and Care

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation [OPRE] released the *Access Guidebook* in 2017¹⁵ which provided a working definition of accessibility in early childhood education that was not previously defined unlike high-quality early care.

A multi-dimensional framework was introduced that reveals common themes of access to be:

- a) Reasonable effort, or an ECE program that is a reasonable distance between work and home, readily accessible information on programs, and has available slots.
- b) Affordability, refers to the financial contribution being a reasonable portion of the household income, utilization of subsidies and/or scholarships for qualifying families, and free care is accessed by those families who qualify.
- c) Support children's development, as high-quality care, offers screening and referrals, provides the same level of high-quality care to children with disabilities and families with hardships, and provides instruction in the child's home language.
- d) Meets the parents' needs in terms of preference (i.e., center or home-based), offers transportation if needed, provides hours of operation that mirror parents needs and work schedules, and provides communication in preferred language.¹⁶

The guidebook illustrates that the literature reviewed displays common themes of availability and utilization of ECE, quality, and cost. The barriers, or facilitators included geographical location, consumer information on availability, reliable transportation, alignment of work hours, and high-quality. They can provide the following definition: a multi-dimensional effort where parents with reasonable effort and affordability, can enroll

¹³ Lloyd, C., Carlson, J., Barnett, H., Shaw, S., Logan, D. (2021). *Mary Pauper: A Historical Exploration of Early Care and Education, Compensation, Policy, and Solutions*

¹⁴ Women's Policy Research and Ascend. (2018). *Parents In College by the Numbers*. Aspen Institute

¹⁵ Friese, S., Lin, V.-K., Forry, N., & Tout, K. (2017). *Defining and Measuring Access to High- Quality Early Care and Education (ECE): A Guidebook for Policymakers and Researchers*. OPRE

¹⁶

their child in an arrangement that supports the child's development and meets the parents' needs (2017).

In 2020, the ORPE the *Conceptualizing and Measuring Access to Early Care and Education* report was released to build on the interagency work being done at the federal and state levels to align with the definition provided in the *Access Guidebook*. Equity is a newly added dimension following the access guidebook and addresses "disparities in the disadvantaged and underserved"¹⁷. This includes income, family dynamics, and race/ethnicity as a largely grouped indicator.

The Importance of (Re)Conceptualizing

Current conceptualizations and measurements of access do not recognize the arduous efforts that Black children and families must undergo in order to approach the indicators provided. To equally embody the accessibility challenges of all Black individuals (whether a student and/or Black immigrants¹⁸, the immigrant diaspora is analyzed in the following section to provide a precedent in terms of inaccessibility to early learning and education. Ultimately, many Black Americans and Black immigrants, must undergo additional barriers to not only enroll in a high-quality ECE program but also have a positive experience.

Flaws and Limitations of the Access Guidebook & Report

Respectfully, the guidebook and 2020 report, does not accurately capture accessibility as defined and conceptualized, for everyone, specifically through the lens of Black children and families, due to major limitations:

- **The methodology has notable flaws.** Researchers identified that as a field, ECE accessibility is a complex and multidimensional concept. Additionally, there were significant challenges in coordinating both system and family perspectives. Examining access has transitioned from being solely viewed from a system perspective to a family perspective, which no longer just considers the supply and demand side of factors, but how families explore services and use them. And while the review of literature recognizes the many dimensions of access and their important roles, not all literature measures the referenced dimensions.
- **The dimensions of access all touch on issues of equity.** The 2020 report¹⁹ acknowledges that while most of the literature (90%) both defines and measure access through at least 3 out of 4 of the following dimensions: (1) reasonable

¹⁷ Thomson, D., Cantrell, E., Guerra, G., Gooze, R., Tout, K., (2020, September). *Conceptualizing and Measuring Access to Early Care and Education*. OPRE.

¹⁸ Howell, M., Pickney, J., & White, L., (2020). *Fighting for the Rights of Black Immigrants in America*. In *Our Own Voice; National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda*.

¹⁹ Thomson, D., Cantrell, E., Guerra, G., Gooze, R., Tout, K., (2020, September). *Conceptualizing and Measuring Access to Early Care and Education*. OPRE.

effort (2) affordability (3) support children's developmental needs (4) meet the parents' needs and (5) equity, equity is not fully assessed. Furthermore, 61% of the literature highlights issues of equity, but the bulk of research centers on the issue of supply and demand, and not on who is most impacted by such supply and demand.

- **The indicators used to measure the dimension of equity are not widely measured.** Researchers largely group social indicators together without considering specific groups to gain insight into cultural preferences and community context. For example, when equity was dissected to reveal measurements, race/ethnicity was listed as one large racial, cultural indicator, without further measuring specific populations of race/ethnicity, country of origin, or dominant language. Additionally, dimensions for this reason, need the ability to be combined and merged to fully illustrate barriers that marginalized families often face when seeking ECE.

The provided dimensions, (i.e., reasonable effort), do not account for the many Black children and families who live in a neighborhood where poverty permeates the community. And despite the considerably high number of Black children that are eligible for programs such as Head Start, far fewer children can solidify a slot ²⁰

Equitable measures will also require ensuring that if affordability is going to be considered in terms of subsidies, subsidies will need to be equally accessible and available to those who qualify, which is not the current trajectory for programs such as CCDBG.²¹ Therefore, the dimensions provided (reasonable effort, affordability, support of children's developmental needs, and meeting the needs of parents), do not reflect the extent to which Black children and families approach equitable access and differential experiences. Furthermore, how accessibility is measured unquestionably accounts for the opportunity gaps that exist in the distribution of necessary resources. "At its core, early childhood measurement is an equity issue".²²

III. The Intersection of Equity, Quality & Accessibility

Research, policy, and practice has positioned quality and access to Lack of accessibility to premier care creates negative long-term implications for Black children as

²⁰ Hardy, E., Joshi, P., Geronimo, K., Huber, R., & Acevedo-Garcia, D., (2020, January). Unequal Availability of Head Start: How Neighborhood Matters. Data-For-Equity-Research-Brief; Diverse Data Kids.

²¹ Babbs Hollett, K., Frankenberg, E. (2022) A Critical Analysis of Racial Disparities in ECE Subsidy Funding. Education Policy Analysis Archives

²² Weiland, C. & Rosado, P. (2022) Widely Used Measures of Pre-K Classroom Quality What We Know, Gaps in the Field, and Promising New Directions

kindergarten readiness averages behind white preschoolers, indicating likeliness of later struggles in attaining academic success.²³

Black children are more likely to be enrolled in center-based care, and the least likely to experience quality care²⁴. Research led by Child Care Aware of America shares that the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and the home-based rating tool, Family Daycare Rating Scale, found that only 25% of Black preschoolers were likely to experience quality classrooms when compared to other races/ethnicities. Such disproportionalities continued in home-based childcare as 53% of programs attended by Black children were rated low.²⁵

Not only are Black children more likely to be enrolled in a center-based setting lead by early education teachers, but their experience in these settings are also more likely to be of lower-quality. In 2019, Education Trust conducted a study²⁶ in which 26 states were analyzed and included in the study, which revealed that only 4% of Black preschoolers were enrolled in quality programs. Furthermore, none of the programs were both high-quality and highly accessible.

The Invisible Intersection of Black and Immigrant

Recent studies such as the study conducted by Pew Research and Migration Policy Institute, illustrate that Black immigrants are growing in large numbers and if the goal is equality that is culturally and linguistically sound, access will need to include this group as well.

Given the vastly changing demographics of the United States, including structurally and culturally, immigration statuses have increased rapidly over the past 20 years and has created the many identities that exist within the black community.

A recent research study conducted by Pew Research²⁷ stated that the number of Black immigrants residing in the U.S has increased in large numbers, from around 800,000 in

²³ Friedman-Krauss, A., & Barnett, S., (2020). Access to High-Quality Early Education and Early Education Research. NIEER

²⁴ Cappizzano, J., Adams G., & Ost, J. (2006). Caring for Children of Color: The Child Care Patterns of White, Black, and Hispanic Children. Urban Institute

²⁵ Dobbins, D., McCreedy M., & Rackas, L. (2016) Unequal Access: Barriers to Early Childhood Education for Boys of Color. Child Care Aware of America

²⁶ Gillispie, C. (2019). Young Learners, Missed Opportunities. The Education Trust

²⁷ Tamir, C. (2022) Key Findings About Black Immigrants in the U.S. Pew Research Center

1980 to 4.6 million in 2018. Insofar, the top contributing regions include Africa and the Caribbeans, with Jamaica and Haiti as the largest countries of origin.

Particularly, children of immigrant parents from Haiti, Dominican Republic, Sudan, and Somalia are more likely to be disadvantaged and experience greater disconnections to services and resources when compared to other countries of origin.²⁸

Despite the immense growing number of Black immigrants in United States, curricula lacks cultural responsiveness that embodies the Black diaspora. Providing a space where Black individuals feel connected to their roots is imperative to healing and acts as an integral part of instruction and socialization for young children.²⁹

Neighborhood & Geographical Location

Extensive research illustrates that access to quality ECE programs varies across communities. Geographical constraints are one of the longest-lasting forms of inequitable practices throughout U.S. history. Many neighborhoods where the predominant population is Black are susceptible to gun violence, chemical hazards, and unavailable resources, in which early learning centers are one of many key necessities that are scarce. The Child Opportunity Index 2.0³⁰ originally launched in 2014, indicates the lack of quality resources that are readily available to children in their neighborhoods when measured across social indicators. Black children fare at the lowest with 7.6 times more likely to live in very low-opportunity neighborhoods.

Neighborhood context is an imperative step in getting access right as it indicates the upbringing and exposures of children by considering developmental risk and allowing for solutions that meet the unique needs of the child. A recent study of neighborhood-informed approaches illustrates the ways in which neighborhoods shape early learning and development:

1. Acts as a setting for child and family interaction.
2. Serves as an institution for direct child interaction and the interaction that shapes responsive parenting.

²⁸ Fix, M., & Capps, R. (2012). Young Children of Black Immigrants in America: Changing Flows, Changing Faces. Migration Policy Institute

²⁹ Boutte, G., Johnson, G., Wynter-Hoyte, K., & Uyoata, U. (2017). Using African Diaspora Literacy to Heal and Restore the Souls of Young Black Children. *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies*, 6(1).

³⁰ Acevedo-Garcia, D., Noelke, C., McArdle, N., Sofer, N., Huntington, N., Hardy, E., Huber, R., Baek, M., & Reece, J. (2020) The Geography of Child Opportunity: Why Neighborhoods Matter for Equity. First Findings from the Child Opportunity Index 2.0. *Diverse data Kids*

3. The influence of the socioeconomic mix of residents depicts the social and physical features of the environment.³¹

Neighborhoods are paramount in the work of equity in federal funded programs such as Head Start. As of 2021, there were 744,898 children in Early Head Start, Head Start, and Seasonal/Migrant Head Start, despite funding amounts of an estimated 840,200 slots for enrollment. More than half of eligible children are not able to attend Head Start, which 54% of those children are Black children. In their 2020 report, *Diverse Data Kids* vividly portrays the inequities in Head Start center gaps. With roughly one quarter of eligible children with a center in their neighborhood, while national data remains equal across states, percentages among states' race/ethnicity vary greatly. Furthermore, an eligibility versus demand analysis found that the "children to centers" ratio for Black children averaged 88 when compared to White children who averaged at 59. The demand for Head Start for Black children far exceeds availability.³²

A 2019 study³³ in Pennsylvania illustrated the association between financial incentives and quality improvement, as ECE providers with higher QRIS, or Quality Rating and Improvement System, received 40% more funding than providers with lower QRIS scores. This study also unearthed that Pennsylvania serves the highest amount of eligible Black children, however, daily tiered funding for Black children in predominantly Black communities was almost \$3 less than those of white children in predominantly white neighborhoods.

Affordability

Affordability as used in this toolkit refers to the tuition, subsidies, scholarships, and other financial assistance or opportunities of financial relief such as the Child Credit Tax Credit. Affordability in respect to operating costs on this side of providers has been omitted from this analysis in the effort to solely evaluate and discuss implications for Black families. Cost of care and tuition assistance is a major barrier in accessibility of early learning programs for Black children and families.³⁴ According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, in 2018, childcare prices averaged from \$4,810 to \$15,417 in 2018, and \$5367 to \$17,171 in 2022.³⁵ barrier in accessibility of early learning programs for Black children and families.

³¹ Hardy, E., Joshi, P., Leonardos, M., & Acevedo-Garci, D. (2021). *Advancing Racial Equity through Neighborhood Informed Early Childhood Policies*. *Diverse Data Kids*

³² Hardy, E., Joshi, P., Geronimo, K., Huber, R., & Acevedo-Garcia, D. (2020). *Unequal Availability of Head Start: How Neighborhood Matters*. *Diverse Data Kids*

³³ Babbs Hollett, K., & Frakenburg, E. (2022). *A Critical Analysis of Racial Disparities in ECE Subsidy Funding*. *Education Policy Analysis*

³⁴ Novoa, C. (2020) *How Child Care Disruptions Hurt Parents of Color Most*. Center for American Progress.

³⁵ Landivar, L., Graf, N., & Rayo, G. (2023) *The National Database of Childcare Prices in Local Areas. Initial Findings from the National Database of Childcare Prices*

When high-quality childcare is available, the price of alarming rates for center-based childcare can exceed median rent or college tuition at \$18,000, in return making affording care unlivable.³⁶

In determining accessibility, one of the first steps is to assess supply and demand of program offerings. Diverse Data Kids reveals that over 70% of parents are employed with children of 13 years and younger in 2014-2017, which remains the same across race/ethnicity groups. Parents who work full-time and are low income are more likely to spend 28% of their income on full-time center based childcare costs, whereas non-low-income families are only likely to spend 10% of their income. Of the full-time working parents, 21% of parents are low income and 32% are Black.³⁷

For many Black families living in poverty, tuition assistance is necessary to make ends meet to meet their other basic needs. Further income assistance programs are vital to aiding 1 in 2 Black households with income stability and access to basic needs.³⁸

The effect of base rate percentiles is an obvious issue for many Black families looking to afford the high costs of early care. Despite the intent to be more affordable for qualifying parents, equal access has not been successful in the implementation phase, as many states fall below the base rate. In return, increasing childcare costs for Black families and impacting household funds. According to research conducted by the Center for American Progress, the lack of care alongside high cost left more than 2 million Black and bi-racial parents reducing their participation in the workforce.³⁹

The Child Care Tax Credit, another long-term benefit of income support alongside other supplemental programs such as SNAP, historically lowered poverty rates to an estimated 8.3% which was a significantly noticeable reduction among people of color including Black individuals. Thus, assistance programs are essential to Black families an opportunity to recover economically from the pandemic, and for those who lived in poverty pre-pandemic, an opportunity to change the trajectory of their household stability.⁴⁰

³⁶ Malik, R., & Hagler, J., (2016) Black Families Work More, Earn Less, and Face Difficult Child Care Choices. Center for American Progress

³⁷ Baldiga, M., Joshi, O., Hardy, E., & Acevedo-Garcia, D. (2018). Child Care Affordability for Working Parents. Diverse Data Kids

³⁸ Hardy, B. (2022). Child Tax Credit Has a Crucial Role in Helping Families Maintain Economic Stability. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

³⁹ Novoa, C. (2020). How Child Care Disruptions Hurt Parents of Color Most. Center for American Progress

⁴⁰ Parrott, S. (2022). In Pandemic's Second Year, Government Policies Helped Child Poverty Rate to Record Low, Cut Uninsured Rate, New Census Data Show. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Availability, Enrollment, and Eligibility

With the racist history of the development of programs for low-income families, such as CCDF and Head Start, implications made the enrollment and eligibility process almost impossible for the millions of families that qualify.

Because of funding availability, eligibility, and enrollment requirements that are complex and arduous, procedures in the enrollment process and eligibility qualifications impact parents of color the most, as Black families are more likely to experience disruptions in employment as a result of COVID-19, in return further complicating eligibility for programs such as CCDBG.⁴¹

Availability and eligibility alone leave millions of Black children and families without access to early learning and care. The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), found in their 2019⁴² report that the number of eligible children not receiving subsidies far exceeds those that do have access to the programs. Furthermore, because states have their eligibility and enrollment process, significant barriers and gaps are a result.

Meeting the Needs of Parents

Lack of flexibility in terms of hours of operation and meeting the needs of families, turns Black children and family away and widens the gap of accessibility. For many Black families, work hours are nontraditional while the operating hours of many public or state-funded pre-k and early care programs are typically traditional working hours of 9-5.⁴³

Providing culturally responsive care to Black children and families addresses the needs of families alongside providing quality care. Culturally responsive approaches include seeking the strength and assets of Black children and families to welcome and support their diversity and resilience.⁴⁴

Needs may often include providing resources to support and address the needs' of parents. There is no one-size fit all approach. When providers are well-informed of the challenges Black families face and equip themselves with resources, supportive measures, and networks in ways that can be easily received by families through proper communication approaches, they not only meet the needs of Black families, but extend

⁴¹ Johnson-Staub, C. (2017). Equity Starts Early: Addressing Racial Inequities in Child Care and Early Education Policy (Executive Summary). CLASP

⁴² Ulrich, R., Schmit, S., & Cosse, R. (2019). Inequitable Access to Child Care Subsidies. Center for Law and Social Policy.

⁴³ Johnson-Staub, C. (2017). Equity Starts Early: Addressing Racial Inequities in Child Care and Early Education Policy (Executive Summary). CLASP

⁴⁴ Wright, B. (2019). Black Boys Matter: Strategies for Culturally Responsive Classroom. NAEYC

accessibility.⁴⁵

Quality is Culturally Grounded

For Black children and families, celebrating culture is a powerful healing practice. Black children have undergone a multitude of anti-black practices that ultimately leave them exhausted, mentally and physically. Their childhood is often minimized through acts that belittle their culture and position them as adults, again illustrating anti-black biases.⁴⁶

Culture is a rich and complex aspect of a child's development that ultimately impact's their identity and well-being. For this reason, it is important for providers and educators to think critically and act intentionally with equity at the forefront.

This means that equity and quality in terms of early care and education should be synonymous and inseparable. A program should not be considered high-quality if they do not have indicators of equity, such as access. Furthermore, quality rating systems should be used as levers for equitable practices, such as revealing issues of accessibility.⁴⁷

Culturally grounded practices are imperative to early learning settings as they aid in establishing authentic relationships with families and position students to achieve.⁴⁸ Cultural responsiveness provides teachers with the opportunity to uplift students and promote the unique development of children. Implementing curriculum that is culturally responsive increases a child's ability to learn and enhances relationship building among peers and teachers.⁴⁹ Standards such as DAP, or developmentally appropriate practices, as established and outlined by NAEYC originally in 1987, align with Eurocentric middle-class families and tend to harbor prejudice assumptions⁵⁰. Anti-bias curriculum is an important tool in a anti-bias classroom and an opportunity to actively promote social justice.

⁴⁵ Iruka, I., Curenton, S., & Eke, W., (2014). The CRAF-E4 Family Engagement Model. Academic Press.

⁴⁶ Blevins, D., Gordon, L., Keyes, A., & Meek, S (2023). Promoting Black Joy. IECMHC

⁴⁷ Meek, S., Iruka, I., Soto-Boykin, X., Blevins, D., Alexander, B., Cardona, M.,& Castro, D. (2022). Operationalizing Equity in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems: Equity is Quality, Quality is Equity. CEP

⁴⁸ Esquivel, K., Elam, E., Paris, J., Tafoya, M., Stephens, C., Ricardo, A., Johnson, A., Radtke, T., Gavilan, A., Joslin, L.,& Flores, A. (2020). The Role of Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Education. An Open Educational Resources Publication by College of the Canyons.

⁴⁹ Weiland, C., & Rosada, P. (2022). Widely Used Measures of Pre-K Classroom Quality: What We Know, Gaps in the Field, and Promising New Directions.

⁵⁰ Souto-Manning, M., & Rabadi-Raol, A. (2018). (Re)centering Quality in Early Childhood Education: Toward Intersectional Justice for Minoritized Children. Review of Research in Education (42)1, 203-225

Quality lastly, should be recognized as an ongoing act that reflects the shift in perceptions of families and communities. At its core, it should be a process that is composed of cultural responsiveness.

Addressing Accessibility in Action

Chambliss Center for Children

The Chambliss Center for Children, located in Chattanooga, Tennessee is a 24/7 operating childcare provider. They are a community-facing, stand-alone non-profit with origins that began as a foster care facility to take in children who were orphaned due to yellow fever, making the agency 150 years old. As the community transitioned into manufacturing infrastructure, the center organically transitioned as well, turning into a full-scale childcare center that operates overnight and on weekends. They pride themselves on being affordable, accessible, and high-quality.

Center Demographics

The program currently has 400 students and counting who are exposed to extended care and school-age programming.

77% of children are Black
10% are White
4% are Hispanic
9% are Other
75% of parents are single
90% of the teachers are Black women

The center has a CDA program on-site to accommodate the large number of qualifying teachers that are employed through the program.

Equity

The Chambliss Center is intentional with the demographics of their community from the very beginning and recognizes how race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, community wealth, education, and family structure, play a large role in the development and care of the children that they serve. They are dedicated to using both an intersectional and equity lens to touch on all aspects of accessibility as outlined in this toolkit.

Reasonable Effort

The center is conveniently located near the bulk of factories and businesses to geographical benefit families. Additionally, the program works to ensure that slots are available to meet the demand, and the community is aware of their program.

Affordability

Cost of weekly programming is based on income and household size and determined by a scale, which indicates a family of four making between \$16,910 and \$18,230 would have a weekly payment of \$75. A family of two with a household income of \$26,010 to \$27,310, would have a weekly payment of \$97. The maximum payment amount is \$215 per week for a family of two with a household income of \$67,610.

Support's Children's Developmental Needs

The center is known for its high quality of care and notably has a state QRIS rating of 3 stars. Additionally, the program offers specialized services for children with disabilities, alongside children who are English Language Learners. Additionally, they utilize a flexible, whole-child-centered, and responsive curriculum, Creative Teaching Strategies. Furthermore, the curriculum promotes the demographics of the teachers who mirror the students, to adapt and provide culturally responsive activities and materials.

Meeting the Needs of Parents

There are a variety of programs that are offered by the Chambliss Center for Children, including extended care, volunteer community preschool, and four other child development centers located throughout the area. Hours of operation is one of their greatest parent and community accommodations as they offer 24/7 care around the clock, including nights, weekends, and holidays to meet families who attend school, have night classes, or work late shifts at one of their local manufacturing plants.







IV. Recommendations

Quality and access to program alone will not remedy the inequities that Black children and families face. Reaching equitable access will require moving away from a Eurocentric lens of quality and truly meeting the unique experiences of Black children, free from harm, bias, and anti-Blackness. Continuing to harm Black children by just providing programs, is inadequate and not equitable considering historical and contemporary inequities.

Strategies for More Equitable Accessibility:

While scholars and practitioners both have addressed and strategized the underpinnings of early learning and care made available to Black children and families, our current state as a nation reflects the very same harsh anti-Black ideologies that existed as early as pre-colonization. This toolkit, therefore, approaches current policies to address the lack of inclusion to Black children and families, including those of the Black immigrant diaspora. As efforts of early care and education increase and strategies identify the prioritization of equity,⁵¹ meeting the unique needs of minoritized groups, and Black children and families as presented in this article, will need to be at the forefront.

The propositions provided in this toolkit highlight the barriers that limit the accessibility to high-quality early care and education predominantly, in federally funded programs, furthermore solutions that policymakers can provide and actions that researchers can address through data collection⁵² and scholarly contributions. For such programs to flourish, they will need to address inadequate accessibility practices and make family inclusiveness a priority.⁵³ The reality is that if a program is to be considered of high quality, it also be easily accessible to all students, including Black students and families.

1. Policymakers and researchers need to align with recommendations from national leaders, such as Ascend Aspen Institute (i.e., *Toward a More Equitable Tomorrow: A Landscape Analysis of Early Childhood Leadership*)⁵⁴ to build a systemic capacity building for leaders at all levels through intentional actions such as
 - Authentically including parents and caregivers as knowledgeable contributing experts in policy, practice, and systems
 - Thinking and acting collaboratively across systems
 - Prioritize opportunities to be advocates, storytellers, and narrators
2. Prioritize establishing the right for all children to access programs that are responsive to the needs of families. Considering the unsuccessful national mobilization for the initiative for Universal Preschool, policymakers need to prioritize ensuring that all children have access at the state level, as depicted in this toolkit, to responsive and inclusive care. Providers and programs will need to

⁵¹ Bassok, D., Galdo, E. (2015). Inequality in Preschool Quality? Community-Level Disparities in Access to High-Quality Learning Environments. *Early Education and Development*, 27(1), 128-144

⁵² Lloyd, C. (2022). Research About Black Families to Advance Early care and Education Policy. *Child Trends*

⁵³ Adams, G., Derrick-Mills, T., & Heller, C. (2016). Strategies to Meet Child Care Needs of Low-Income Parents Seeking Education and Training. Urban Institute

⁵⁴ *Toward a More Equitable Tomorrow: A Landscape Analysis of Early Childhood Leadership*-Ascend at the Aspen Institute. (2022)

include Black families culturally and linguistically that welcome the rich history of Black families and require to not only to be aware of cultural assets but celebrate them.⁵⁵

3. Address funding to increase neighborhood and geographic accessibility through mixed delivery systems. Black children will need investments in both equity and equality should they have the same equal access to quality education.⁵⁶ Special attention to the funding of federal programs such as Head Start and CCDBG will need to increase should more children, explicitly, marginalized children who are often excluded from quality programs, have attainable access. This would include taking into consideration neighborhoods where there are heavy populations of low-income Black children and families and a low quantity of high-quality care.
4. Create incentives and increased accountability measures to ensure states provide equitable access in terms of funding for providers that meet high-quality benchmarks. States should also remove barriers in the enrollment process and accommodate families by offering multiple languages. Additionally, states should provide extensive outreach efforts to inform families of available services.⁵⁷
5. Increase efforts for research and data collection centered on Black children and families to monitor the progress and future implications of accessibility in early learning and care. A synthesis of the literature reveals that black children and families are often grouped with other minoritized groups. If the goal is to specifically address barriers that Black children and their families face, then efforts to explicitly understand Black children and their families will need to increase, in addition to providing Black children and families opportunities to narrate and story tell their own experiences.
6. Prioritize culturally responsive practices to center Black students and families. Include the vastly growing number of Black immigrants into consideration to accessibility and quality. Not only will accessibility and quality need to include equity as an indicator, but such indicators will also need to be conceptualized and measured through the lens of equity and cultural responsiveness. Prepare and promote programs that recognize and support the large growing body of Afro/Caribbean immigrants.

⁵⁵ Lloyd, C., Shaw, S., Sanders, M., Abdul-Masih, M., & Schafer, C. (2022). Reimagining Black Families' Cultural Assets Can Inform Policies and Practices that Enhance Their Well-Being. *Child Trends*.

⁵⁶ Curenton, S., Iruka, I., & Durden, T. (2017). African American Children in Early Childhood Education (Vol 5, pp.3-6). Emerald Publishing

⁵⁷ Gillispie, C. (2019). *Young Learners, Missed Opportunities*. Education Trust