



Early Childhood Education Amid COVID-19:

Joint Statement and
Policy Recommendations from the
National Black Child Development Institute
(NBCDI) & UnidosUS • NOVEMBER 2020



NBCDI
National Black Child
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Rebuilding
Better for
Black and
Latinx
Children



The many impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic emphasize the critical importance of early childhood education (ECE), which encompasses a variety of providers and program types (including child care providers, Head Start/Early Head Start, and state pre-K programs).

In this unprecedented era, the ECE workforce has been at the frontlines; as essential workers themselves, they are relied upon by families who depend on the availability of child care and early education programs in order to continue working at jobs that are essential to our health and to the economy. For public safety, many educators in K-12 settings have transitioned to virtual learning to protect themselves and their children from the spread of COVID-19. However, ECE educators working with children birth through age five often do not have this option. In a time of instability and uncertainty across the country, we must recognize the profound importance of the ECE workforce, which is majority women and comprised of many women of color.

Black and Latinx educators make up a critical portion of the ECE field; 31% of the center-based workforce and about half of those employed in Head Startⁱ. These diverse educators are from communities where the impacts of the pandemic have been the most detrimental — according to CDC data, Latinos and African-Americans in the United States have been three times as likely to become infected as their White neighbors, and nearly twice as likely to die from the virusⁱⁱ. “Tragically, CDC data also show that as of July 1, more than half (53.8%) of all confirmed cases among patients under the age of 18 are Latino.”ⁱⁱⁱ More than one in five jobs held by Black, Latinx, and immigrant women in California disappeared between March and May 2020.^{iv} While many communities are suffering, the pandemic is also impacting children’s learning and social emotional development.

Research shows that early childhood is a critical time for brain development and stable connections with caregivers are extremely important. The landmark publication *Preventing Reading Difficulties* pinpointed the preschool period as the time when children develop the skills,

knowledge, and attitudes (“early literacy skills”) that are foundational to reading success. For those families who have provided care and education at home, the disruption in ECE will impact their children’s development and learning. The effect of trauma and social isolation for countless children during this time heightens the need to support a diverse and well-qualified ECE workforce.

NBCDI and UnidosUS recognize this time as a critical opportunity to rebuild ECE better: to prioritize and increase investments in the field, with a focus on equity and diversity, while continuing to emphasize and increase quality. ECE must rebuild better. ECE has and will continue to transform and rebuild as the industry shifts due to COVID-19. As the field seeks to reopen or works to transform to meet this new reality, NBCDI and UnidosUS underscore the importance of equity in access to high-quality ECE for all children and supporting a diverse and well-qualified workforce. We rebuild ECE better by explicitly supporting Black and Latina educators; recognizing that a diverse, well-compensated, and well-qualified workforce is a fundamental component of high-quality programs.



The following brief contains joint policy recommendations developed and disseminated by NBCDI and UnidosUS¹, based on our recent qualitative research efforts. In 2018, UnidosUS conducted 10 focus groups with ECE teachers among their Affiliate organizations operating preschool programs. The focus groups involved 94 participants from state pre-K and federally funded ECE programs in Los Angeles, CA; Stockton, CA (two groups); Sunnyside, WA; Red Granite, WI; Philadelphia, PA; Raleigh, NC; Avon Park, FL; Kansas City, MO; and Nashville, TN. In 2018 and 2019, NBCDI engaged with Black educators in eight focus groups and community and stakeholder engagement meetings in Chicago, IL; Houston, TX; Augusta, GA; Washington, DC; Omaha, NE; Grand Rapids, MI; New York City, NY; and Compton, CA.

¹ Latina Teachers and the “BA Challenge:” Impacts and Conditions of Increasing Degree Requirements in Early Childhood Education (http://publications.unidosus.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1986/unidosus_thebachallenge_lr.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y)

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Based on this research, our recommendations address three issue areas: first, ensuring equal access to resources and funding; second, prioritizing the development and implementation of culturally and linguistically responsive policies, practices, and classroom environments; and third, increasing the compensation and professional development opportunities for advancement of the ECE workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Ensure equal access to resources and funding to stay open or reopen and meet health and safety requirements.

Black and Latina ECE educators need equal access to resources to support them in keeping their businesses open and to reopen as we seek to stabilize the economy during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the child care industry especially hard, causing widespread layoffs as a result of catastrophic drops in enrollment and mandatory closures to reduce the spread of the virus.^v Child care centers serving communities of color or low-income communities are at greater risk of closing permanently than White-owned centers and providers in White or high-income communities.^{vi} Policymakers and ECE administrators must ensure equitable access to funding and resources for Black and Latina ECE educators to reopen and continue to serve families and children. Before the pandemic, there were major racial disparities in children's access to high-quality ECE that meets their cultural and linguistic needs and enables their parents to work. As we rebuild the economy after COVID-19, this country has the opportunity to lay the foundation for a stronger child care industry with equal access to high-quality ECE.

NBCDI and UnidosUS call on policymakers to:

1. Require states to track ECE programs and family child care (FCC) providers/programs that have closed. Track the supply of child care across diverse communities to measure and mitigate the impact of the coronavirus.
2. Identify and address "child care deserts." With more ECE programs closing in communities of color, the issue of child care deserts will be exacerbated. Grants and technical assistance to apply for funding should be targeted in areas that have been identified as new and previously existing child care deserts.
3. Track the distribution of funding (loans and grants) to ECE and FCC providers and to ensure equitable resources are dedicated to support ECE program and FCC in diverse communities.



RECOMMENDATION 2:

Prioritize the development and implementation of culturally and linguistically responsive policies, practices, and classroom environments.

Now more than ever, culturally and linguistically responsive policies and practices are an imperative for ECE: for all children, all families, and all programs. Policies and practices that are culturally and linguistically responsive give those most impacted by structural racial inequity the opportunity to be involved in the implementation of the institutional systems that impact their everyday lives. Black and Latinx children and their families need and greatly benefit from teachers and programs that understand and implement culturally and linguistically responsive policies and practices. All diverse children and their families also benefit from the retention and development of a representative ECE workforce.

Culturally and linguistically responsive policies and practices (and the research supporting them) have been available for decades. More than 30 years ago, the *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* was published. The goal of the curriculum was to identify, confront, and eliminate barriers of prejudice, misinformation, and bias about specific aspects of personal and social identity. The second

edition of the curriculum focuses on four core goals—identity, diversity, justice, and activism. Individual chapters discuss culture and language, racial identity, family structures, gender identity, economic class, and diverse abilities.

Almost 30 years ago, the then Head Start Bureau released *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs*. The document presented 10 Principles, based on the research evidence available at the time, aimed at advancing program policies and practices. In 2010, the document was revisited and updated to reflect the extensive expansion of research evidence that had been developed since the initial publication.

Twenty years ago, the National Research Council released *Neurons to Neighborhoods*, a landmark publication that remains widely influential and often-cited today. The report made the crucial observation that human brain development and its implications for learning require ECE programs to recognize culturally and linguistically responsive policies and practices as essential. As the authors state, the “development of all young children and the functioning of all families unfold within a distinctive cultural context.”^{vii}

With the onset of the global pandemic, a commitment to culturally and linguistically responsive practices is more important than ever before. Black and Latinx children and their families need and deserve ECE programs that actively and intentionally promote their children’s sense of belonging; positive self-concept and identity; tolerance for others; and their learning and development.



NBCDI and UnidosUS call upon policymakers to:

1. Develop written standards and policies that require all ECE settings to recognize and implement culturally and linguistically responsive practices and environments as an essential element of high-quality ECE; prioritize and invest resources accordingly.
2. Develop a federal/national diversity, equity, and inclusion fund to provide resources for all ECE settings and programs to ensure that:
 - a. The diversity of the workforce reflects the diversity of the children enrolled.
 - b. Training and technical assistance is available so that providers and programs implement high-quality environments, considering and including children's diverse experiences and perspectives without generalizing or stereotyping.
 - c. Data are collected and reviewed to ensure that degree requirements do not cause Black and Latina teachers to lose their jobs or leave the field.
3. Require that ECE teacher preparation programs build awareness and understanding of diverse cultures, linguistic diversity, personal beliefs, values, and biases among educators, and include strategies for engaging with diverse families and being responsive to the needs of their communities into their curricula and degree program requirements.
4. Establish mechanisms in order to track and report annual data on diversity and equity in the ECE workforce, which may include collecting comprehensive data on race/ethnicity, gender, compensation, access to professional development, technical assistance, and coaching and other indicators of equity.

Culturally and linguistically responsive policies and practices have been strongly affirmed by decades of research evidence. However, supports must be provided to advance the current levels of dissemination, understanding, and implementation.



RECOMMENDATION 3:

Increase the compensation and professional development opportunities for advancement for all sectors of the ECE workforce.

UnidosUS and NBCDI have a shared goal of increasing the compensation and opportunities for professional development and advancement of the ECE workforce; an objective which was at the forefront of conversations prior to the pandemic.^{viii}

There has been a decades-long trend towards upskilling and increasing the educational requirements of ECE educators. Early learning and development are valuable, powerful and consequential; ECE educators are skilled professionals who should be compensated accordingly and provided with equitable opportunities for furthering their professional development and learning.

Therefore, UnidosUS and NBCDI believe that the best way to advance quality in ECE programs is that ECE educators should receive pay and benefits that become commensurate with their job responsibilities, educational requirements, and professional obligations.

UnidosUS and NBCDI call upon policymakers to:

1. Implement an ECE minimum wage of \$20 per hour plus comprehensive benefits, including medical, dental, and vision insurance, paid time off, and a retirement savings plan, for teachers with a bachelor's degree in ECE in all publicly funded programs.
2. Create clear pay bands that provide pay increases which correspond to increasing levels of educational attainment and provide ECE programs and providers with funding to pay teachers at least \$20 per hour. To deliver on a true commitment to equity, educators required to meet the same education and licensing standards should receive equitable salaries. States must ensure that the financial burden of increased compensation is not passed on to families.
3. Address issues of pay parity between ECE programs and their respective state K-3 system; between center-based and home-based programs; and between teachers working in infant/toddler classrooms and those working with three- and four-year-olds; this is imperative to address inequities for educators of color, who are more likely to be infant/toddler teachers and work in home-based settings.
4. Ensure equity in access to degree programs by seeking comprehensive support through a federal scholarship program covering tuition, books, fees, and stipends for expenses for all educators committed to the ECE field.



Additionally, all members of the ECE workforce should receive hazard pay and health care during the pandemic. These providers should be placed into the first responder category themselves in order to ensure care for the children of first responders and essential workers amidst stay at home orders and continued school closures. As this under-resourced workforce is asked to take on increasingly hazardous duty in the name of protecting public safety during the pandemic, it is appropriate that states consider action to address both the compensation and health care needs of workers putting themselves and their own families at risk by providing this essential service.

Everyone within the ECE workforce benefits from a more just and equitable system. Accounting for past and current inequities will help provide that the ECE workforce, particularly those most impacted by racial

inequities are able to thrive. A just and equitable system will maintain and increase the much-needed diversity of our ECE educators. As this workforce grows in diversity, Black and Latinx educators are more affirmed in their abilities and can use their newfound equity to be the owners, planners, and decision-makers in the systems that govern their lives. As the ECE infrastructure becomes equitable for “all” the workforce, the problematic disparity in the educational outcomes for children of color can improve. Supporting the need for equity and diversity will lead to a higher quality of ECE programs; focused with a nuanced awareness of children, including their racial and social identities. These high quality ECE programs will benefit children and families of color and fight to undo the systemic factors that are working against them.

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Endnotes

- i** Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., & Edwards, B. (2018). *Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2018*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <http://cscce.berkeley.edu/topic/early-childhood-workforce-index/2018/>.
- ii** <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-latinos-african-americans-cdc-data.html>
- iii** UnidosUS, *The Latino Community in the Time of Coronavirus: The Case for a Broad and Inclusive Government Response*. http://publications.unidosus.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/2066/unidosus_latinosin-thetimeofcovid.pdf?sequence=7&isAllowed=y.
- iv** <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/07/13/coronavirus-black-and-latinx-women-in-california-have-lost-work-at-three-times-the-rate-of-white-men/>
- v** <https://www.ffyf.org/relief-for-child-care-providers-included-in-the-cares-act/>
- vi** https://www.stltoday.com/opinion/columnists/gary-parker-and-atia-thurman-fragile-early-childhood-education-system-at-greater-risk/article_9097d8d0-d84e-51d9-8279-f0889cad7f92.html
- vii** National Research Council. 2000. *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. (p. 369).
- viii** UnidosUS, *Latina Teachers and the “BA Challenge:” Impacts and Conditions of Increasing Degree Requirements in Early Childhood Education*. http://publications.unidosus.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/2053/unidosus_thebachallenge_lr.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

About NBCDI

For 50 years, the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) has been committed to our mission to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and families through education and advocacy. With our National Affiliate Network, we develop and deliver strengths-based, culturally relevant, evidence-based, and trauma informed curricula and programs that focus on health and wellness, family engagement and literacy. We support increased access to effective education by providing professional development scholarships for early childhood educators. NBCDI, the National Affiliate Network and our members advocate and inform education policies at the federal, state and local levels to ensure standards, regulations and resource allocations support equitable systems for Black children and families.



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About UnidosUS

UnidosUS, previously known as National Council of La Raza (NCLR), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our community stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit www.unidosus.org or follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

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