

THE   
EDUCARE **5**  
PUBLIC POLICY  
PRIORITIES  
TO ENSURE ALL FAMILIES THRIVE



# Shining a Spotlight on Public Policies that Matter Most to Families & Educators of Young Children

At Educare, we believe that every child deserves the opportunity to be successful in school, and in life. Drawing on our experiences and expertise as parents and early childhood professionals, researchers and school leaders, advocates and community partners, the Educare Learning Network's policy agenda, The Educare Five, recommends five policy priorities to ensure all children, families and communities can thrive.

## Who is the Educare Learning Network?

### We are infants, toddlers, preschoolers, & parents.

Educare students and their families represent the hope and future of urban, suburban and rural communities across the country. Nearly 4,000 infant, toddler and preschool children and their families attend our comprehensive center-based early care and education programs demonstrating positive child and family outcomes each year. Nearly 90% of children who attend our schools are children of color and 1 in 3 are dual language learners. The diversity and resilience of Educare families and staff strengthen both our Network and the broader early childhood system.

### We are early childhood professionals & leaders.

More than 2,000 staff provide early care and education for young children and families in 25 independent nonprofit birth-to-five schools located in 15 states, the District of Columbia and on tribal land on the Winnebago Indian Reservation. Together, these schools voluntarily make up the Educare Learning Network. Over half of our teachers and family support staff identify as Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian and/or Indigenous. We engage in continuous professional development and program evaluation and improvement with our research partners to ensure the highest quality of service for our students and families.

### We are advocates for high-quality early learning & care that transforms lives.

As parents, early childhood professionals, researchers and community leaders, we believe that early learning increases equity and opportunity for all. We have first-hand experience with systemic barriers, and are acutely aware of the need for greater investments in strong early childhood systems. We have decades of data and knowledge about the true value of high-quality early care and education and community supports in the lives of young children and families.



Building on our previous POLICY FRAMEWORK, our priorities represent the expertise and recommendations of families and early childhood professionals.

- 1 UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE & EARLY LEARNING
- 2 STABLE & SUPPORTED FAMILIES
- 3 THRIVING EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE
- 4 HEALTHY & SUPPORTED CHILDREN
- 5 STRONG EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS IN EVERY COMMUNITY



# An Agenda Defined by Our Voices

In early 2021, the Educare Policy Workgroup, including school leaders and policy staff in Educare schools, led a process to create the first Educare Learning Network policy agenda. We met virtually as parents, school leaders, teachers, family support specialists, community and research partners, and policy and program staff to identify the policy priorities that matter most to all of us. Created through contributions from across our roles and communities, the first Educare Learning Network Policy Agenda, The Educare Five, is an authentic representation of the policy priorities identified by our Network families and staff across 15 states, the District of Columbia and on tribal land.



“We are learning and growing and our voices are being heard.”

-Patty Hernandez,  
Educare Family Engagement Liaison

CLICK TO HEAR  
VOICES OF  
OUR NETWORK

CHERYSE SINGLETON-NOBLES  
EDUCARE PARENT



“The resilience of the early childhood workforce is inspiring, but they can only shoulder so much.”

-Michael Burke, Buffett Early Childhood Fund Vice President

“If parents and caregivers have the resources we need for our kids, for housing... everyone would thrive.”

-Ealasha Vaughner,  
Educare Parent



Inequities in the early experiences of young children and their families have existed for decades. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to intensify this reality, especially the negative impact of systemic and structural racism on Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian families. As families and early childhood professionals within the Educare Learning Network, we understand this reality because it affects our children and our lives every day.

The inequities, the systemic barriers, the challenging realities impact us—but they do not define us. We hold meaningful insights and knowledge, and our cultures, identities and histories serve as sources of strength and resilience. Collectively, we uplift our expertise and experiences to present The Educare Five—policy recommendations that reflect the steps we believe will help to move toward a more equitable future for young children and their families.

# 1

## UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE & EARLY LEARNING

Ensure families have access to high-quality, culturally-responsive, equitable early learning and care at no or low cost, in the setting they most prefer, during the time they need care.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ▶ **Robustly fund early childhood programs** so all families can afford care that meets their needs. Account for historical disparities by ensuring policies and investments guarantee equitable and appropriate distribution of resources.
- ▶ **Ensure greater flexibility in early learning program eligibility to accommodate increases to the minimum wage and fluctuations in income** so all families—particularly those furthest from opportunity—can benefit from and maintain access to early learning services.
- ▶ **Expand access to Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCPs)**, which bring together the best of Early Head Start and child care programs to provide comprehensive, continuous, and seamless early child development and family engagement services.

We know that quality early childhood programs require policies and adequate resources to provide the education, development, and comprehensive supports young children and their families need and deserve. Yet public funding for early care and education reaches barely half of 4-year-olds in low-income households, and the percentage is less for children under age 3. Only 11 percent of eligible infants and toddlers are served by Early Head Start, and only 8 percent of all infants and toddlers have access to federal child care assistance.<sup>1</sup> We also know that too many children are underserved by low-quality programs and by caregivers who do not adequately meet a family's cultural or linguistic preferences.<sup>2</sup>

As parents and professionals, we recognize that policies and investments that increase economic security are essential to the well-being and stability of children, families and staff. Without policy protections, however, families may experience benefit losses, including child care supports, due to much-needed minimum wage increases.<sup>3</sup>

COVID-19 revealed both the fragility of the under-resourced child care industry and the strengths of the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) model.

For more information, click to read [A Path To High Quality Child Care Through Partnerships](#)—featuring the voices and stories of EHS-CCP partners in the Educare Learning Network during the pandemic.



1. [https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/04/2019\\_inequitableaccess.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/04/2019_inequitableaccess.pdf);  
<https://www.nhsa.org/national-head-start-fact-sheets>

2. [https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017/12/2017\\_EquityStartsEarly\\_0.pdf](https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2017/12/2017_EquityStartsEarly_0.pdf);  
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/ParentEngagement-FINAL.pdf>

3. <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Thecareminimum.pdf>

# 2

## STABLE & SUPPORTED FAMILIES

Ensure young children and their families have adequate finances and resources to access the housing, care, services and supports needed to thrive.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ▶ **Expand investments, such as child tax credits, to foster financial security** for families with young children.
- ▶ **Extend early childhood and basic supports for the whole family**, including multi-generation programs and services that support needs, such as housing.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to amplify the inequities, disinvestment, and discrimination many families face every day. Although deeply resilient, our families and communities —especially those most impacted by historic marginalization—are among those hit hardest by the negative effects of the pandemic. In just the first six months of the pandemic, 40 percent of parents living with a child under the age of 6 reported they or their family experienced a loss of employment or work-related income.<sup>4</sup> Never has it been a more critical time to support policies and investments designed to increase the financial stability, safety, and wellness of families of young children, particularly families of color who have been historically and disproportionately affected.<sup>5</sup>



4. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/six-months-pandemic-40-percent-parents-young-children-have-experienced-economic-fallout>  
5. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/racism-and-discrimination-contribute-to-housing-instability-for-black-families-during-the-pandemic>;  
<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/racism-and-discrimination-contribute-to-housing-instability-for-black-families-during-the-pandemic>

## VOICES OF OUR NETWORK

IHEOMA U. IRUKA  
RESEARCH PROFESSOR OF POLICY—  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
CHAPEL HILL; EDUCARE NATIONAL  
EVALUATION PARTNER



# 3

## THRIVING EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

Ensure early childhood teachers and staff are skilled, well-compensated and supported while promoting young children’s learning, health and development.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ▶ **Promote investments to ensure higher, more equitable pay and benefits** for early childhood staff.
- ▶ **Strengthen equitable funding and supports for professional learning and educational opportunities** to improve knowledge and practice and build pathways for career advancement.
- ▶ **Expand supports for staff well-being**, such as paid time off, medical benefits, mental health services and family supports.



We know that professionals in early childhood programs engage in complex and creative work teaching, caring for and supporting the healthy development of young children. They often do so with limited resources and inadequate compensation—challenges exacerbated by the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic and structural racism.<sup>6</sup> Staff that care for and educate our youngest citizens, during such a critical period of life, are among the lowest paid professionals in the education sector. These factors limit programs’ ability to attract, hire and retain highly skilled staff.

In addition to adequate wages, educators need professional learning supports and training that enhance their current practices and build opportunities for growth in their career. Policies and investments designed to improve early childhood practice and encourage career growth must reflect the experiences and perspectives of educators of color and multilingual staff.<sup>7</sup>

We have seen and experienced first-hand the impact of the pandemic and structural racism on the mental health and overall well-being of early childhood staff, particularly women of color who make up most of the early childhood workforce. Often parents themselves, early childhood professionals are being stretched and stressed beyond capacity as they continue to support children and families within our schools and communities across the country. In order to both survive and succeed, early learning professionals must have access to resources that support their well-being and mental health in addition to their professional growth.

6. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/racial-wage-gaps-in-early-education-employment/>; <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/01073800/NSECE-report2.pdf>; <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/04/23/483846/frontlines-work-home/>; <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/>

7. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/increasing-qualifications-centering-equity>



# HEALTHY & SUPPORTED CHILDREN

Ensure young children have consistent access to the physical and mental health supports and services they need to thrive.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ▶ **Support infants, toddlers and children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families** through increased investments and expanded services, including fully funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- ▶ **Strengthen children’s mental health and social emotional development** by prioritizing investments in related resources and supports.

We know that all young children need nurturing caregivers and access to supports that help them to grow and flourish, along with opportunities to play and learn with other children. We also know that families, early learning professionals and programs need appropriate resourcing and supports to meet the full range of a child’s mental, physical and emotional health needs.

Yet across the country, young children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families face barriers to accessing inclusive, quality early learning and receiving the appropriate and timely services that meet their developmental needs.<sup>8</sup> Children of color are generally underrepresented in receiving special education services and experience disparities in placement and services.<sup>9</sup> We assert that for all children to thrive, we need increased investment and policies designed to address barriers to inclusion of children with developmental delays or disabilities in early childhood programs, particularly children of color.

We also know that a child’s mental health and well-being shape their learning and experiences in life. The uncertainties and traumatic realities of the pandemic have further underscored the importance of mental and emotional health supports for children and their families experiencing significant stressors.<sup>10</sup>

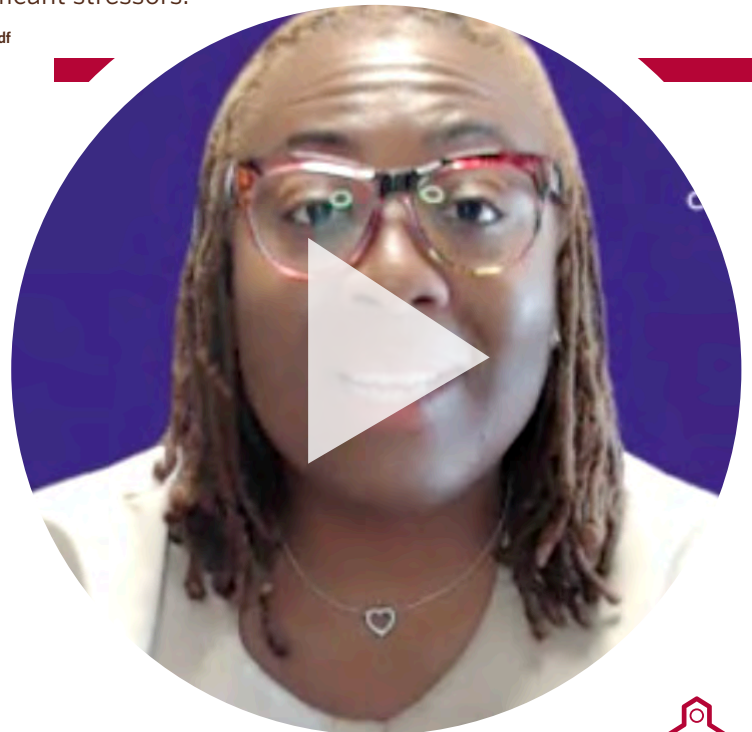
8. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/policy-statement-inclusion-children-disabilities.pdf>

9. <https://childandfamilysuccess.asu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-12/14-priorities-equity-121420.pdf>

10. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/a-national-agenda-for-childrens-mental-health>

## VOICES OF OUR NETWORK

DANIELLE JORDAN  
SENIOR MASTER TEACHER—  
EDUCARE CHICAGO/START EARLY



# 5

## STRONG EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS IN EVERY COMMUNITY

Ensure families experience continuity of care and responsive services as a result of aligned systems and policies.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ▶ **Align eligibility** across early childhood programs and services.
- ▶ **Coordinate and collaborate effectively across system areas** (health, education, housing, etc.).
- ▶ **Embed equity indicators** within early childhood accountability and monitoring systems.

We must ensure cohesiveness across the policies, programs and supports serving young children and their families. Early childhood systems should respond to the needs of all families, while also working to address historical inequities faced by families and children of color, immigrants and underserved communities.

Policies and investments must be aligned to create stronger early childhood systems by developing a common eligibility criteria and application process; establishing better coordination and collaboration across early learning and other critical sectors impacting families; and ensuring accountability systems are designed through the lens of equity.



### Leading the Way Together

Each of the priorities in The Educare Five requires deep commitment, strong partnerships and orchestrated action. We know that it will take all of us to give young children and families the best chance for success in life, at a time when we face challenges on many fronts. But as we listen to each other, we will learn and arise stronger and wiser. As we grow in number and volume, we will make our voices heard and our priorities will be realized. **Join us in making The Educare Five a reality for children and families across the country.**

### Join the movement:

- ▶ **Follow and share!** Stay informed about opportunities to advance priorities of The Educare Five by using and following our hashtag **#educare5**
- ▶ **Join the conversation!** Connect with others working to ensure all young children and families thrive by joining the discussions on the Early Childhood Connector. **Sign up for a free account at [econnector.org](http://econnector.org).**
- ▶ **Lift every voice!** Go to [educareschools.org](http://educareschools.org) to access resources and tools to use your voice in this movement and to encourage others to do the same. Together, we will lift up the expertise of families, teachers, and those who work to support them.
- ▶ **Stay connected!** We will use social media to share opportunities and updates related to The Educare Five policy priorities. **Make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter @educareschools**
- ▶ **Practice self-care!** Advocating for yourself and others takes energy and effort, particularly during times of crisis. Finding even small ways to restore and replenish will build our collective resilience. Together, we will create a brighter future for all of us.