

Fr: Voices for Illinois Children and the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

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To: Bethany Patten, Governor’s Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding

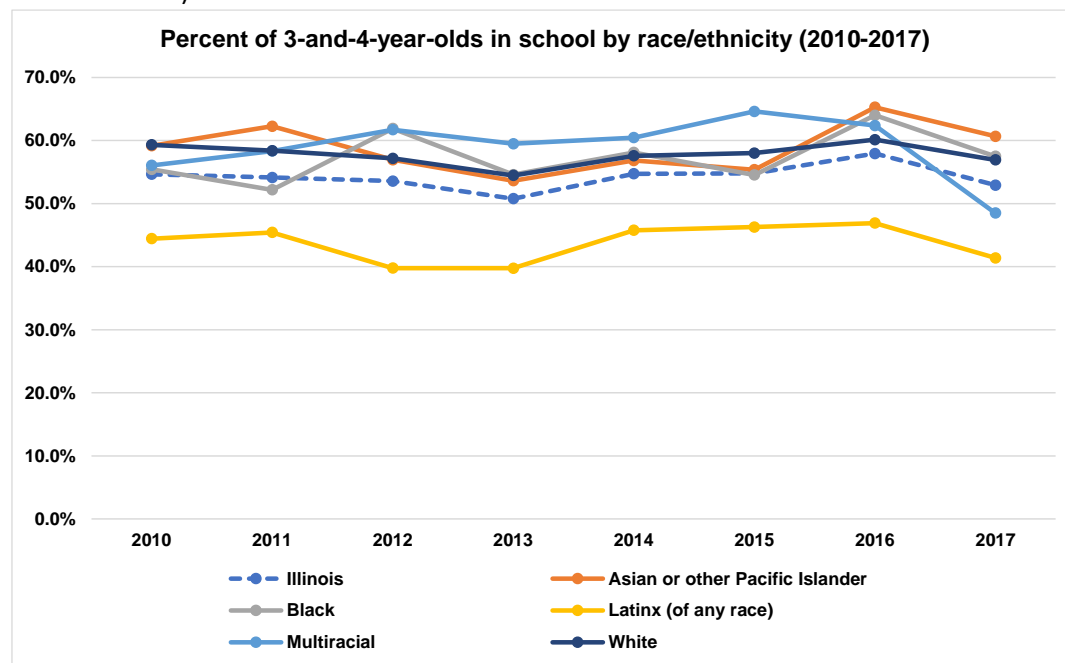
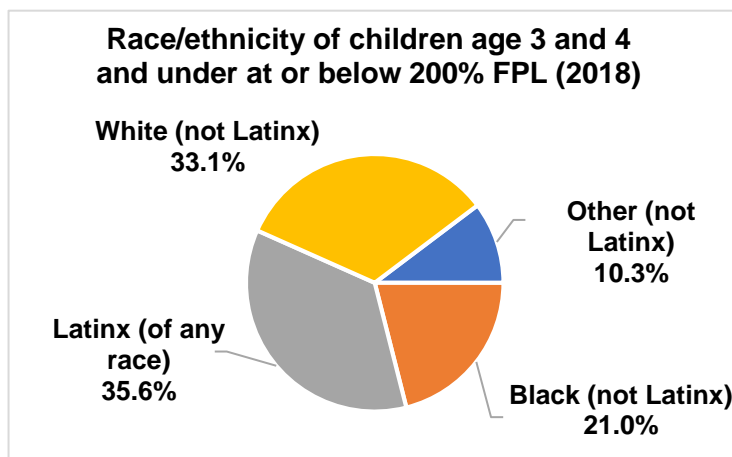
Date: 7/10/20

Voices for Illinois Children – Powered by the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Governor’s Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding. Our comments center on three main ideas:

- The framework adopted by the Commission needs to be child centric.
- It is important to maintain a mixed-delivery system, which addresses children’s mental health needs and strengthens support services for home-based and center-based providers.
- It is important to take specific steps to address the inequities across our state regarding access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and reduce those inequities illustrated in the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS).

Facts on Access and Achievement

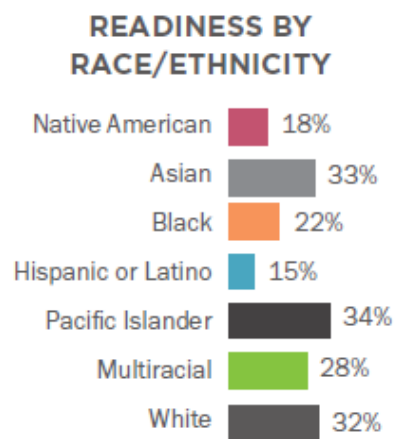
When examined by race and ethnicity, there is a mismatch between the proportion of three and four year olds at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and three and four year olds in school. The proportion of Latinx children in school is much lower than their relative proportion of the state’s population. (School includes nursery school, preschool school or kindergarten during the previous three months.)



Data Sources: U.S. Census Bureau

The 2018-2019 Illinois Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) Report shows only 15% of Latinx children and 22% of Black children demonstrated in all three assessed areas (social and emotional development; language and literacy, and math) versus 32% of white children.

According for the Center for American Progress, 58% of Illinois residents in 2018 lived in a child care desert (a ratio of more than three young children for every licensed child care slot constitutes a child care desert). “Child care supply was especially low among certain populations, with 65 percent of Hispanic/Latino families and 69 percent of rural families living in areas without enough licensed child care providers.” (Source: <https://childcaredeserts.org/2018/index.html?state=IL>)



Statement on Race and Ethnicity

During its last meeting, the Commission discussed a Race Equity Working Group to review preliminary recommendations. We believe it is not just applying a race equity to preliminary recommendations based on the perspectives of the need to combine funding streams and house operations within one agency but also establishing a race equity framework to work within based on the data. As such, we believe the following questions should be front and center:

- Is there equal access to pre-school and child care for children of all races and ethnicity?
- Why to the disparities in child readiness based on KIDS exist?
- Why do child care deserts exist?
- Is there equal access to the market (as a provider) for persons of all races and ethnicity?

Along these lines, it is necessary to strengthen the working definition of racial equity. Both the Funding Commission and the Early Learning Council need to amend the existing language by reiterating within the definition versus priorities that an **early learning system is one that ends racial and ethnic disparities and achievement gaps through the delivery of a range of services that maximizes every child’s potential.**

Furthermore, the Commission needs to examine (and establish a process for continual examination) the following sets of data disaggregated by race and ethnicity and compare them to the state’s population of children eligible for ECEC services broken down by race and ethnicity as well as KIDS annual data. These sets include¹:

- utilization of ECEC services by program including subsets on those children accessing ECEC services during regular working hours (9-5) versus off-hours and weekends,
- the composition of the ECEC workforce, and
- the composition of any policymaking or administrative body involved in the allocation of ECEC funds.

The Commission also needs to embed within any Request for Proposal issued by any agency allocating ECEC funds (whether for new applicants or existing providers) additional questions to review how

¹ Some of the recommendations below were also made in 2015 by an Equity Subcommittee to Oregon’s Early Learning Council.

effectively a provider is serving minority communities including whether the provider's workforce is reflective of the community and children served by that provider.

Service Delivery

Reducing racial and ethnic inequities may also depend on expanding the range of ECEC services available to a household. We believe a guiding principle in this regard should be providing to a home visit to any family requesting it. A home visit can help any coordinating agency better determine the necessary family supports to help a child reach his or her potential.

One of the recommendations in a report released last year by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development titled "Ensuring Equitable Access to Funding for All Birth-To-Five Classroom-Based Early Childhood Programs was strengthening and supporting a robust community-level planning processes. The best mechanism for coordinating these needs on a regional basis would be the existing Child Care Resource and Referral system.

An enhanced CCR&R system could:

- Establish a racially and ethnically diverse advisory panel of parents, home-based providers, center-based providers, and community organizations that would regularly review the allocation of funds within the CCR&R service delivery area
- Enhance data collection of the racial and ethnic makeup of families and children seeking to access services through a CCR&R
- Utilize the data collected for a regular needs assessment report to the state (whether each year or every two years) on ECEC services within the CCR&R footprint
- Provide community specific data and information to the Governor's office, Early Learning Council and other stakeholders
- Actively promote state funded ECEC services within the community to encourage new applicants working in underserved areas
- Have a professional development and technical assistance unit that would assist current providers and help a pool of potential new RFP/grant applicants with the necessary data collection and paperwork
- Work with INCCRRRA (Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies) on creating and enhancing existing purchasing pools for educational resources, equipment needed for life safety measures, and personal protective equipment to address any on-going coronavirus or similar issues
- In coordination with the state, develop and provide a range of support services and training opportunities for home-based care providers

Regarding the last point, it is important that a portion of the state's ECEC funds be set aside to develop educational materials for the parents of children in state funded early childhood education and care settings (both home and center based). In recent years, Voices for Illinois Children ran an early math program. One of our conclusions was that engaging parents/guardians/siblings to work with their children to reinforce lessons learned in an ECEC setting were important components in that child's development of math skills. The state can assist in this process (and for other areas of skill development) by an enhanced home visiting effort (noted above and stated in recognition of the Governor's desire to increase the number of home visits funded in the future by the state) as well as greater interaction of parents and CCR&R staff in reviewing the allocation of funds. This should also include the development of a range of virtual learning opportunities (whether developed by a coordinating state agency or a local CCR&R) that is also culturally and linguistically appropriate for children served by the CCR&R system.

The steps outlined above would occur along with steps the Commission has already discussed regarding:

- an examination and potential increase in reimbursement rates
- reduction in family co-pays for any ECEC services
- additional partnership measures with Illinois' higher-education community to increase the ECEC workforce

Voices for Illinois Children and the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago look forward to working with Commission members and staff during the remaining months of the Commission's work. As noted before, we also look forward to the opportunity to discuss some of these issues in a future focus group with one or more of the Commission's working groups as well as a community forum/virtual town hall meeting.

In advance, thank you for your consideration of our thoughts on the state's ECEC system.