

## Incorporating Racial Equity into the Work of the Early Childhood Funding Commission

### **Executive Summary**

The charge of the Early Childhood Funding Commission is to “study and make recommendations to establish funding goals and funding mechanisms to provide equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and care services for all children birth to age five and advise the Governor in planning and implementing these recommendations.”

There is a substantial body of knowledge regarding current racial inequities in the early childhood system and other state and local systems and policies that disadvantage Illinoisans of color. Equitable access to these services must lead with racial equity, through a system designed to be fully funded, aligned and comprehensive, and anti-racist. The Commission can incorporate racial equity into both its deliberations and recommendations through intentional inclusion of community voices and intentional discussion and evaluation of the impact of its recommendations on racial groups.

### **Suggested Tactics**

In meetings and stakeholder engagement:

- Integrate at the beginning of each meeting the voices of those who will be most greatly affected by the recommendations of the Commission: hear directly from providers, families, and community members in a brief, couple minute narrative (in-person or video recorded in advance).
- Hold virtual and/or in-person focus groups, comprising those who will be most greatly affected by the recommendations of the Commission, to evaluate and provide input and feedback on the recommendations for each Commission Working Group. (Summer 2020)
  - See, as an example, focus groups of school-based and community-based providers convened by the Funding Adequacy Working Group to validate and revise the cost model that forms the basis of the Working Group’s deliverable.
- Hold virtual and/or in-person regional hearings, focus groups, and surveys targeted toward those who will be most greatly affected by the recommendations of the Commission, to provide input and feedback on the full package of Commission recommendations. (Fall 2020)

In deliberations:

- Incorporate into the Commission’s guiding materials the definition of racial equity and the racial equity principles developed by the Build team and approved by the Early Learning Council.<sup>i</sup>
- Embed the racial equity definition and principles into the Commission’s recommendations as they are being developed.
- Evaluate initial recommendations from each Working Group through a racial equity lens.

In the recommendations:

1. Identify who should be involved in evaluating the Commission’s recommendations through a racial equity lens, prioritizing families and providers.
  - a. Rely on Commission members and advocacy community to identify a diverse cadre of families and providers, overrepresenting those identified earlier to be most greatly

affected by the recommendations of the Commission (for instance, low-income families most likely to rely on publicly funded ECEC services, communities of color, etc.)

2. Evaluate the recommendations through a racial equity lens, using a tool such as a Racial Equity Impact Assessment.

### **Who should be involved?**

- Members of the Early Childhood Funding Commission and its Working Groups
  - At least one co-chair
  - At least one Commission member from each Working Group
- Members of the Build Initiative's Illinois Team focused on racial equity in early childhood education and care in Illinois (most of whom are also members of the Early Learning Council)
- *[It may be helpful to identify a trained facilitator who can guide the work, such as Erikson Institute.]*
- The group should report frequently to the full Commission so as to keep the group apprised and provide opportunity to course correct or revise any recommendations as a result of any evaluations.

### **Using a Racial Equity Impact Assessment to Evaluate the Commission's Recommendations**

A Racial Equity Impact Assessment is a set of questions that can help groups to investigate the benefits and burdens of a policy or practice and avoid unintended consequences.

The purpose of conducting a Racial Equity Impact Assessment alongside the Early Childhood Funding Commission's development of recommendations is to interrogate who the recommendations are likely to benefit, who they are likely to burden, and how the Commission can ensure the recommendations can facilitate greater racial equity and dismantle and transform past racist policies and practices. Further, conducting a Racial Equity Impact Assessment alongside the Commission's work can set a precedent for future evaluations of early childhood related policy proposals in Illinois, and meaningfully demonstrate the state's commitment to racial equity in early childhood policy.

The final deliverable of such an assessment would be a report back to the Commission containing recommendations for how the Commission's proposals should be tweaked or revised to ensure greater racial equity across early childhood education and care. This report could be received at a full Commission meeting in Fall 2020 and could lead to discussion designed to improve the Commission's proposals before they are finalized.

### **What tools can help the Commission complete the assessment?**

There are several tools, resources, and methods that can support the Commission in completing a Racial Equity Impact Assessment. Chicago United for Equity (CUE), an Illinois group that works with community members and government partners to facilitate Racial Equity Impact Assessments, has adapted their own [Racial Equity Impact Assessment tool](#) from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity's "[Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity](#)." Other tools that may be helpful include resources on human-centered design and design thinking, including CUE's own [resources on designing for equity](#), as well as broader resources from groups like Race Forward (such as their description of the four levels of racism – internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural – in [this report](#)).

## **Proposed Methodology**

A small group composed of <10 representatives from the above bodies can complete a Racial Equity Impact Assessment of the Early Childhood Funding Commission's work over the course of four two-hour meetings.

### *Meeting 1: June*

- Background information and overview of CUE's [Racial Equity Impact Assessment](#)
- Determine group's final deliverable and methodology
- Begin drafting stakeholder engagement necessary to successfully complete Racial Equity Impact Assessment and plan for incorporating this work into Commission's planned stakeholder engagement or requests to advocacy community to support stakeholder engagement

### *Meeting 2: July*

- Step 1 of CUE's Racial Equity Impact Assessment: determine outcomes and stakeholders
  - o Q1: What is the policy and what problem is it trying to solve?
  - o Q2: What other issues can this proposal impact?
  - o Q3: Who are the key groups impacted by this issue?
  - o Q4: How will these groups be involved in decision-making?
- Step 2 of CUE's Racial Equity Impact Assessment: look at numbers and narratives
  - o Q5: What data will we collect and look at? Why?
  - o Q6: Where do we see disparities in the numbers?
  - o Q7: What can we learn from histories and narratives to better understand these numbers?
  - o Q8: What questions still remain? What information do we wish we had?

### *Meeting 3: August*

- Step 3 of CUE's Racial Equity Impact Assessment: measure benefits and burdens
  - o Q9: What are the benefits of the proposed recommendations and who is most likely to receive them?
  - o Q10: What are the burdens of the proposed recommendations and who is most likely to bear them?
  - o Q11: What are the different options to make the proposed recommendations racially equitable?
- Begin drafting outline of report to Commission

### *Meeting 4: September*

- Step 4 of CUE's Racial Equity Impact Assessment: evaluate and be accountable
  - o Q12: How will we evaluate the impacts of the proposed recommendations?
  - o Q13: How will stakeholders engage in ensuring equitable outcomes?
  - o Q14: How will we report back on these outcomes?
  - o Q15: How will our evaluation impact improvements to the policy?
- Finalize report to Commission

## **Next Steps**

1. If feasible, identify a facilitator who could support a Racial Equity Impact Assessment of the Commission's recommendations.
2. Identify Commission members who may be interested in serving on a Working Group focused on racial equity, to include completion of a Racial Equity Impact Assessment.
3. Seek the Commission's approval to:
  - a. Incorporate into the Commission's deliberations the Early Learning Council's definition and principles of racial equity
  - b. Create a Working Group focused on racial equity, whose responsibilities would include conducting a Racial Equity Impact Assessment of the Commission's recommendations
4. Establish the working group, including members external to the Commission.
5. Begin the methodology outlined above.

---

<sup>i</sup> Early Learning Council Racial Equity Definition:

- A racially equitable society values and embraces all racial/ethnic identities. In such a society, one's racial/ethnic identity (particularly Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian) is not a factor in an individual's ability to prosper.
- An early learning system that is racially equitable is driven by data and ensures that:
  - Every young child and family regardless of race, ethnicity, and social circumstance has everything s/he/they need to develop optimally;
  - Resources, opportunities, rewards, and burdens are fairly distributed across groups and communities so that supported and not further disadvantaged; and
  - Systems and policies are designed, reframed, or eliminated to promote greater justice for children and families.

Early Learning Council Racial Equity Priorities:

- Align and standardize race/ethnicity data collection and reporting.
- Transform processes for distributing resources to facilitate racial equity, including agency contracting.
- Ensure compensation equity and access to advancement across demographics in workforce.
- Eliminate racial/ethnic disparities for children participating in all programs that contribute to school readiness and life success starting with:
  - Enrollment in preschool for 3- and 4- year olds
  - Enrollment in prenatal to age 3 services and programs.