

RACIAL EQUITY WORKING GROUP

Recommendations Analysis

ILLINOIS COMMISSION ON EQUITABLE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE FUNDING



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chicago United for Equity (CUE) engaged in a three-pronged Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) inspired analysis of the Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding's recommendations between October and December 2020. This shortened timeline limited the depth of analysis; however, findings and recommendations should serve as a guide for a more robust future process across the state. The analysis involved focus groups with CUE Fellows, parents, and providers as well as four meetings of a Racial Equity Working Group (composed of Commission members and members of the Illinois BUILD Team) to review the Commission's recommendations and provide feedback on how to best improve racial equity in the recommendations' implementation. The various groups focused closely on analyzing who would be impacted by the recommendations and in what way, how the recommendations or their implementation could be made more racially equitable, and what accountability, stakeholder involvement, and evaluation measures should be put in place to support racial equity moving forward.

High-level observations and themes from the groups' review include the following:

Prioritize racial equity in the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

1. The State needs to make an explicit, stated commitment to using a racial equity lens moving forward.
2. The State should plan, execute, and evaluate implementation of the recommendations, with a racial equity lens.
3. The State must recruit and involve a diverse, representative group of stakeholders most impacted by the recommendations to guide implementation.

Conduct meaningful engagement.

1. The State should create a more inclusive engagement process.
2. The State should co-create the service options offered to local communities with service recipients and impacted stakeholders, particularly those groups that are underrepresented.

Create community accountability.

1. The State must implement recommendations in collaboration with an inclusive set of stakeholders. This includes creating an implementation steering committee with broad and diverse parent and provider representation and creating an equity council within the new agency with large parent and provider representation.
2. Create an accountability office within the new early childhood education and care state agency that prioritizes qualitative data in addition to quantitative data reporting on the equity outcomes of the early childhood education and care system.
3. Create a performance scorecard that disaggregates metrics by race and is accountable to communities through implementation.
4. Support the data capacity of providers and communities.
5. Provide adequate funding and agency staff capacity to do the items above.

Ultimately, executing these recommendations will require investment in state capacity and resources and external support from the state's early childhood stakeholder community. Embedding a racial

equity lens into the work of early childhood systems integration and transformation is not a given; rather, it takes intentionality, thoughtful deliberation with those most impacted at the table, dedication to equity in process, and the resources to secure external expertise to execute.

About CUE

In 2016, Niketa Brar and Elisabeth Greer met on the Local School Council of National Teachers Academy (NTA) in Chicago, Illinois and began working together to advance their shared interest in promoting educational equity in their neighborhood. The next year, Chicago Public Schools announced interest in closing their successful elementary school and displacing NTA's majority Black, majority low-income students. The two women began working with friends and neighbors to strategize on how to address this inequitable policy proposal with a systemic response.

That desire for systemic reform led to CUE's work to champion the use of a community-led policymaking process called the Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA). Since launching the REIA process to measure the burdens and benefits of closing National Teachers Academy and setting a national civil rights precedent in halting the closure, CUE has trained 200 people in the use of the tool, launched four more REIA processes, and has seen REIAs embedded in the blueprints of organizers and new government leaders across Chicago.

This work is anchored in CUE's central purpose of connecting and amplifying the power of individuals to build just, equitable, and inclusive communities. Together, CUE is working to:

- Build a network of ethical and effective racial justice advocates across Chicago's and Illinois' civic infrastructure and beyond,
- Demonstrate tools and models for equitable policies and practices, and
- Develop public accountability models for racial equity.



Our Approach

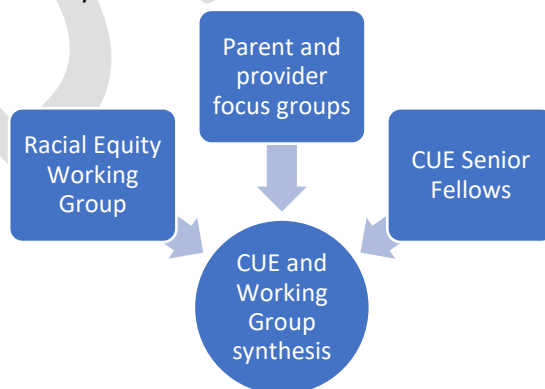
CUE approaches racial equity work with an understanding that racial equity is defined as both a *process* and an *outcome*. As a process, it involves building better outcomes for everyone through centering and shifting decision-making power to those who are experiencing current and historical racial disparities. As an outcome, racial equity is a future where race can no longer predict life outcomes. Racial equity requires explicit *acknowledgement of our racial history* in addressing policy problems, *shifting power* to groups historically excluded from decision-making, and designing future policy to achieve outcomes that are *no longer predicted by race*.

One of the tools that CUE uses is a Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA)¹. An REIA is a tool that helps develop a stronger equity lens in our decision-making and solution-finding and has been used by local governments across the country². It can help see unintended consequences of a proposal, who benefits most and who will bear the most burden³, and ways to get at the same intent without reiterating harm on the same groups that have historically been burdened. We do this because policies are not color-blind and not made in a vacuum. An REIA forces us to examine history, context, and lived experiences to inform our work. The REIA tool is used across the country⁴ to aid communities and government organizations in developing equitable decisions in public policy.

Our Task

CUE began working with the Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding in early October 2020. CUE was engaged to review the Commission's recommendations through a racial equity lens to identify high-level concerns and opportunities to incorporate a racial equity approach into implementation of the Commission's recommendations, including the potential for an REIA. In addition, CUE was asked to identify guidelines to promote accountability within the implementation process reflecting recommendations from key stakeholders, with a focus on deepening civic trust with the most impacted communities to propel engagement and co-ownership in future implementation efforts.

In order to present high level findings for a Commission meeting on November 10, 2020, CUE engaged in a three-pronged REIA-inspired analysis of the Commission's recommendations. Analysis, discussion, and



¹ CUE's approach to a racial equity impact assessment can be found here:

<https://www.chicagounitedforequity.org/reia>

² See Government Alliance for Racial Equity (GARE) https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf

³ See Appendix A for analysis results.

⁴ For examples see https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf

findings from the three groups below were summarized after November 10 in order to inform this document.

- CUE Fellows: In addition to the two Senior Fellows leading this project, four other CUE Fellows with connections to education participated in two sessions each between October 21-23 to conduct an REIA-inspired analysis.
- Parent & Provider Focus Groups: With assistance from the Early Childhood Funding Coalition, participants who had already participated in a previous focus group on the recommendations were asked to participate in a “focus group 2.0” to conduct an REIA-inspired analysis. There were two participants in the parent focus group on October 26 and four participants in the provider group on November 2.
- Commission Racial Equity Working Group: A group of 21 commission members and members from the Illinois BUILD team engaged in an REIA-inspired analysis over the course of four sessions. These sessions took place on October 26, October 29, November 20, and November 30. Note that the third and fourth sessions took place after the presentation of high-level findings on November 10 and were folded into this document.

The racial equity analysis faced a number of constraints. Not only was racial equity not explicitly prioritized in the draft of the Commission’s recommendations, but the short timeline did not allow CUE to do as deep and as broad of an engagement process as typically would be done in order to evaluate a proposal. With just a month turnaround to present high level findings, only two parents and four providers were able to attend the focus groups.

Both parents identified under the umbrella of Hispanic/Latina and while both had deep lived experiences and knowledge to contribute, they could not serve as sufficiently representative of parent experiences in the state. Ideally, there would have been an opportunity to engage parents from the Early Learning Council’s priority populations⁵ as these are groups that have historically not been served or served well by the current early childhood system and whose perspectives are therefore critical to engage; they will be directly impacted by the Commission’s recommendations and so the Commission should have invested more time and resources to engage them.

The providers who participated in the focus group identified as Black/African-American or White/Caucasian and represented the Chicago and Cook County area, central, and western Illinois. This again is not representative of provider experiences throughout the state. The Commission should have invested greater time and resources to ensure that all types of providers from all parts of the state were engaged in reviewing the recommendations through a racial equity lens.

Due to these constraints, this process cannot serve as a sufficient, standalone, and inclusive racial equity engagement analysis; however, it can serve as a guide for a more robust future process across the state. Authentic community engagement, especially targeted engagement to those who have been historically underserved, needs to be broad and deep; this has not happened. The State must invest in the

⁵ Access Committee - All Families Served Subcommittee of the Early Learning Council. Recommendation on Priority Populations February 2019.

resources and capacity necessary to conduct inclusive, authentic engagement, and this level of engagement must happen throughout further development of the recommendations beyond their submission to the Governor, preparation for and implementation of those recommendations, and evaluation of the process. For these reasons, our analysis is incomplete; as a necessary but insufficient step, our analysis emphasizes the need for further community engagement around these recommendations in order to work towards racial equity.

High Level Observations

After a cursory review of the Commission's documents and draft recommendations, the CUE team made several observations with racial equity implications on the Commission's work. To start, one of the Commission's Guiding Principles is to 'Ensure Equity, to endorse a system that ensures equitable outcomes for children, with intentional focus on race, ethnicity, culture, language, income, children's individual needs, and geography.' Yet the recommendations CUE fellows were asked to review did not use the term 'racial equity' at all or mention the potential disparate impact of the recommendations on different communities across the state. While it appears that the Commission had planned more in-depth stakeholder engagement that was challenging to implement due to the pandemic and limited data, and Commission discussions did include references to racial equity throughout the year, explicit analysis of the recommendations from a racial equity lens did not begin until October 2020.

CUE believes that racial equity must be baked into the decision-making process from the beginning (racial equity as a process). Making recommendations and then evaluating their racial equity merit afterwards, rather than building racial equity into the recommendation development process from the beginning, will not achieve the intended outcomes, will not get the resources needed to do the work, will not change institutions or structures in the long-term, and may actually exacerbate inequities.

To use the analogy of baking a cupcake, racial equity cannot be the sprinkles, it must be the flour. It is a crucial ingredient that once mixed into the batter or baked is impossible to separate from the rest of the cupcake. A racial equity lens must be used from the very beginning of development of a proposal all the way through to implementation and evaluation in order for it to actually impact processes and outcomes. Beyond the work of the Commission and the implementation of its recommendations, this kind of approach is something the State should consider adopting in all future policymaking if it hopes to improve the lives of its citizens, particularly those who have been historically underserved.

In addition, the State must acknowledge that high-quality early childhood services, no matter how equitably distributed, cannot by themselves address the problems of systemic and structural racial inequities. Building a racially equitable early childhood education and care system is necessary but insufficient; it is just one in a series of critical steps the State must take to reckon with racial and ethnic inequity in Illinois and build a racially just future for the state. These recommendations must be a part of a larger set of strategies across systems to address inequities in the state. Furthermore, creating racial equity in early childhood education and care must involve close collaboration with and action from other systems outside of early childhood. Moving forward, there are three things the State must commit to in order to advance racial equity in the Commission's recommendations.

Prioritize racial equity in the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

1. The State needs to make an explicit, stated commitment to using a racial equity lens moving forward.

The State must not use low-income as a proxy for racial equity. Socioeconomic status has been conflated with race, but the two are not the same. Using a racial equity lens means explicitly acknowledging racial history in addressing policy problems, shifting power to groups historically excluded from decision-making, and designing future policy to achieve outcomes that are no longer predicted by race. Racial equity requires calling out current and historical disparities. The State must publicly acknowledge and name the racial, ethnic, and economic marginalization that has and continues to take place. It must commit to using a racial equity lens in decision-making in early childhood education and care, including policy and investment decisions, systems centralization or transformation, and other findings identified during engagement and implementation.

2. The State should plan, execute, and evaluate implementation of the recommendations, with a racial equity lens.

Using a racial equity lens must start from the beginning of the policymaking process and cannot be tacked on at the end. If the State does not have the knowledge, expertise, or experience in-house, then the State needs to allocate resources to bring in those who do that have the knowledge, expertise, and/or experience. Committing resources indicates that the State does hold true to its word.

3. The State must recruit and involve a diverse, representative group of stakeholders most impacted by the recommendations to guide implementation.

CUE views the list of priority populations from the Early Learning Council as a good starting point for identifying groups that have largely been underserved by the current early childhood education and care system, as children and their families will be directly impacted by the recommendations. However, the list does not include language about race/ethnicity and to apply a racial equity lens will require engaging different racial/ethnic groups.

For this reason, the State should explicitly describe the groups it will prioritize in engagement related to the Commission's work, including planning for implementation, and should consider updating the priority populations list to reflect engaging different racial and ethnic groups. The State should also consider less identifiable groups, such as children with different experiences of trauma, groups that do not currently have access to early learning programs, and/or children and families who are being served outside of current licensed and school environments; these are key stakeholders to engage moving forward. Statewide representation of directly impacted groups is important. This should include all geographical regions of the state (northern, central, southern), different types of settings (urban, suburban, rural, mixed), a range of income levels, different race/ethnicity groupings, and more.

Conduct meaningful engagement.

There are a number of aspects to consider when designing stakeholder participation in complex governance processes⁶, but overall, racial equity is about centering and shifting power to those who have been historically excluded from decision-making. In order to do so, the State needs to move from being more exclusive to more inclusive, from giving community members the least amount of power to the greatest amount of power, and from ignoring or informing community to deferring to it. All of this is

⁶ See Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of participation in complex governance. *Public Administration Review*, 66(SUPPL. 1), 66–75.

more resource-intensive in terms of time, energy, and funding, but it is the only way to begin to work towards racial equity in processes and outcomes.

1. The State should create a more inclusive engagement process.

Public actors such as the State tend to rely on expert administrators, elected representatives, and professional stakeholders when soliciting feedback. This elevates a certain type of power and knowledge over lived experiences of those directly impacted by the system. However, it is precisely those with lived experiences whose knowledge is most important to engage.

2. The State should co-create the service options offered to local communities with service recipients and impacted stakeholders, particularly those groups that are underrepresented.

The State tends to give families who could benefit directly from services little power over shaping those services – how they are arranged, oriented, distributed, evaluated, and who is prioritized for receipt of such services. Currently, families may personally benefit from engaging with early childhood services and will sometimes communicate with or advise/consult the State on early childhood issues. However, giving families more authority would allow whatever is designed to be more effective (there is no guarantee of the ‘if you build it, they will come’ development approach) and therefore have the best chance of reaching racial equity in both process and outcome.

While the State often denies access to decision-making processes, sometimes it does provide the community with relevant information and/or gather input from the community (that may or may not be taken into account). The Commission has used activities such as public comment during meetings, focus groups, community forums, and surveys, and has relied on previous research into Illinois’ early childhood system that used similar engagement activities. This places the Commission’s community engagement in the middle of the spectrum below, but moving forward the State must do more, such as determining which decisions the State needs advising and consultation from community, and for which decisions shared control over decision-making could be successful and in the interests of communities.

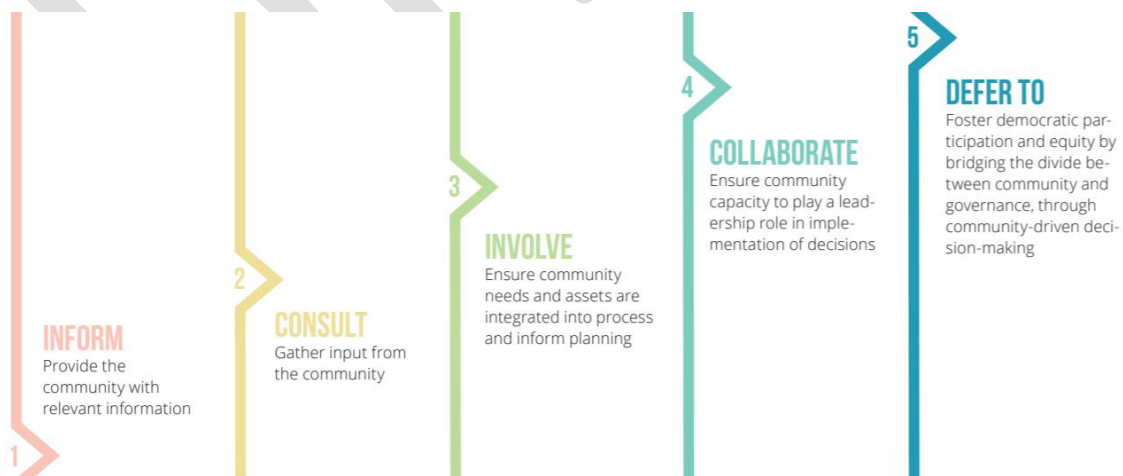


Figure 1 - The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership⁷

⁷ Movement Strategy Center. (2020, October 26) The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership. <https://movementstrategy.org/b/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Spectrum-2-1-1.pdf>

Create community accountability.

There is no more important time to create accountability for equity than in an environment of scarcity, and until Illinois achieves adequate funding for early childhood education and care services and is no longer in a precarious fiscal environment, Illinois will operate in an environment of scarcity and will need to prioritize where its resources are allocated.

Prioritizing racial equity in the Commission's process and conducting meaningful engagement well-equips the State to be accountable to community and families. There are multiple pieces the State can put in place in order to ensure it is accountable to the children and families in Illinois.

1. The State must implement recommendations in collaboration with an inclusive set of stakeholders. This includes creating an implementation steering committee with broad and diverse parent and provider representation and creating an equity council within the new agency with large parent and provider representation.

There are many approaches to engaging community in policymaking and implementation⁸⁹. In order to have high parent and provider engagement, there must be multiple different access points for both parents and providers with a sliding scale of intensity of involvement. Creating opportunities for a broader base to engage means the base will more likely be representative of the state and therefore be able to help identify and address inequities in the system. This can include involving the Early Learning Council's Family Advisory Committee, who should have access to review and assess data metrics and monitor progress.

Engaging parents can be difficult, particularly priority populations and/or those who are not connected to the state's early childhood education and care system. One approach is to leverage the connections that parents already have to different entities. That includes finding parents connected to early childhood collaborations, applicants to the Early Learning Council's Parent Advisory Council, parent representatives at Head Start programs or other early childhood education and care programs, local school councils, parent ambassadors trained by parent and community organizers such as COFI, parents who have children in early childhood education and care programs, and others. Providers, case managers, family support workers, home visitors, and more have already built trusting relationships with parents and should be leveraged. Even with this base, the State should conduct stakeholder mapping to identify stakeholders in need of inclusion. The State should avoid defaulting to stakeholders who are typically involved and engaged and should actively seek out and develop additional voices from across the State.

Too often, lived experiences are not valued as much as position and education, and lay stakeholders are not valued as much as professional ones. Within committees and councils, other members must see parents and providers as the experts of their experiences and create a welcoming space for them. This

⁸ See Vitalyst Health Foundation. (2019). Pre-Community Engagement: Setting the Stage for Authentic Community Engagement. Retrieved from <http://vitalysthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/VitalystSpark-PreCommunityEngagement.pdf>

⁹ See Attygalle, L. (2019). Creating the culture for community engagement: How fear may be holding us back from authentic engagement. Tamarack Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/paper-creating-culture-community-engagement>

does not happen right now with usage of acronyms, jargon, and different procedures such as “Robert’s rules” that many parents, providers, and even early learning professionals may not know about. Explanations, orientations, and small changes to existing procedures to make them more accessible can go a long way to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment while still meeting requirements such as those in the Open Meetings Act.

There should be a required minimum percentage of parents and providers on some decision-making bodies (a parent focus group participant suggested 51% minimum parent representation; some states require 20% or more parent participation). All members of an implementation steering committee and equity council should have decision-making power and/or the recommendations made by them are binding and have to be implemented by the State.

Finally, the State should create and employ decision-making guidelines that center those most impacted in early childhood education and care (namely, children and families). The guidelines should be informed by parents and providers who then help with deciding funding priorities (who gets what first), defining access and quality, and identifying accountability metrics. One option would be the Early Learning Council’s adopted Racial Equity Impact Assessment questions.

2. Create an accountability office within the new early childhood education and care state agency that prioritizes qualitative data in addition to quantitative data reporting on the equity outcomes of the early childhood education and care system.

Qualitative data should include narratives from local service recipients gathered through a public engagement process. Feedback loops need to be built in so those implementing the recommendations have constant information about how that implementation is playing out on the ground for those who are both receiving and providing services. Local and regional data on access, quality, affordability, family and provider experience with the system, and more, needs to be collected to roll up to a state level; that data must then also be available and accessible at the local level so that communities can use it to inform work that is being done in the community. All data must be disaggregated by race.

The State must promote a culture of data-based decision-making to support racial equity in services, including a commitment to using data as a flashlight and not a hammer on communities and providers. Data collection is often seen as punitive, for example with regards to child care licensing. Instead data should be used to ask questions, probe for root causes of problems, and examine opportunities to do things differently and more effectively.

3. Create a performance scorecard that disaggregates metrics by race and is accountable to communities through implementation.

Measuring performance and creating informational resources for the public is a starting place for accountability. The State has a responsibility to provide transparency at the community level so that stakeholders can hold the State accountable. Performance tracking requires the measurement of short-term outputs all the way to long-term outcomes in a scorecard that is updated regularly. At a minimum the short-term outputs could be updated annually, and the State should publish an annual report on early childhood education and care in the state and racial equity in that system. Some of the possible metrics that came from focus group participants include:

- Readiness indicators by race¹⁰
- Proportion of family income dedicated to child care by race
- Number of high-quality seats in communities compared with racial make-up of communities
- Number of providers in communities by race
- Enrollment in early childhood education and care programs in communities by race and priority population
- Early childhood professional compensation by race
- Turnover rates for early childhood staff by race
- Diversity of representation in collaborations and stakeholder activities across all provider types and families

4. Support the data capacity of providers and communities.

There needs to be quality data collection, including disaggregation of all metrics by race. To get quality data, community level capacity must be built both in terms of knowledge and expertise, but also in resources such as IT firewalls, shared databases, computers, and internet access. This should be a critical part of the capacity building grants described in the Commission's recommendations.

As mentioned before, there will need to be support around building a culture of data-based decision-making to support racial equity in services and a commitment from all to using data as a flashlight and not a hammer. There has been broken trust between providers and the State when it comes to data in the past and even now, which will require work on the part of the State to repair. Repairing relationships requires state agency leadership to set a culture valuing transparency, consistency, and a willingness to actively listen to families and providers and leverage feedback from them to change policy and decision-making to better support them.

5. Provide adequate funding and agency staff capacity to do the items above.

Funding needs to be earmarked to support parent and provider participation in decision-making and accountability entities within the new early childhood state agency, including compensating parents and providers for their time and for removing barriers to their participation. This could include providing child care, food, transportation, internet access/devices, interpretation/translation, American Sign Language and/or live captioning, holding meetings at different times (to then capture second and third shift parents), and more.

Funding should also be earmarked to support partners and community stakeholders in engaging parents and providers. Partners and community stakeholders have the relationships at the local level to be able to reach out to those who most need to be heard from, but there is currently no statewide structure in place to support this. For some partners and community stakeholders, this may be a fundamental shift in how they do things which will require support and resources. Allocations could include parent education and parent support liaisons.

¹⁰ Currently there is no universal Pre-K assessment. Alignment with the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) assessment is needed.

Finally, the State must provide adequate state staff capacity to successfully support and facilitate parent and provider participation in such groups. Engaging with community partners and stakeholders and providing the parent and provider supports listed above requires coordination and communication, which is time-intensive.

Findings in Recommendation Analysis

These findings were developed through a series of discussions with CUE fellows, parents, providers, and the Racial Equity Working Group, inspired by Steps 3 and 4 of CUE's REIA tool.¹¹ In examining the impact of the recommendations, participants largely agreed on what the recommendations could have a direct impact on and what it could have an indirect or neutral impact on; impact could be positive or negative depending on implementation. Participants explored these impacts because a systemic change of this size can have wide ranging impacts outside of the provided services. For example, family competition for slots with high-quality providers (public and private funded) could be a driver of segregation and changing migration in the region, as seen with families moving to particular communities to guarantee their children receive a high-quality education for K-12. There are many possible impacts of these recommendations that go beyond early childhood that should be considered so that potential negative or disparate impacts may be mitigated in planning and implementation.

Recommendation on funding goals: The cost to provide equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and care is \$11.7 billion in public funds.

Items the Commission should address

- **The adequacy cost estimate should include funding for parental education and support.** Parent participants brought up the issue of how parents are wary of the system; it is overwhelming and complicated, and some may have fears – providers too – about impacts on them such as their immigration status. Particular populations will need specialized support.
- **The adequacy cost estimate should include funding for parental inclusion and authentic community engagement.** This was described already in the Creating Community Accountability high level observations. Parental and community inclusion and engagement would allow parents to shape the services provided. There should also be consideration given to the cost of having dedicated staff to build relationships with parents, community members, and community leaders, as well as investment in development of parent councils and stipends for families to participate in trainings and meetings.
- **The adequacy cost estimate should include funding for culturally responsive services and professional development for providers and educators.** Providers need training and resources to be able to meet the needs of diverse families, especially those who have not historically had access to the early childhood education and care system.
- **The adequacy cost estimate should include funding for capacity building at the local level.** The infrastructure percentage in the funding recommendations is vague about the spending to

¹¹ See Appendix A.

create the new agencies' systems and start-up costs. Included in start-up costs should be funding for local capacity-building and infrastructure, especially in areas with very few seats or child care deserts that may face additional barriers for early childhood education and care services. Capacity-building and infrastructure may include connection to the early childhood system, training and technical assistance to engage with the early childhood system, capacity and skill-building for existing early childhood providers to be able to compete and thrive in a new early childhood system, and the resources necessary for local entities to participate in shaping policy and funding distribution in support of racial equity. Separately, local infrastructure funds for facilities construction and renovation should also be included in the cost model.

Items that must be addressed in implementation

- **Prioritize services based on identified needs, priority populations, and rectifying existing racial inequities.** Identify which services will be prioritized and for whom so that inequities are not exacerbated. Avoid situations where those with more access and privilege take new slots over others with more diverse needs. Work directly with communities, including educators and providers of color, to determine the specific service needs at the regional and local level. To do all of this, develop a set of decision-making criteria or guidelines in partnership with parents and providers across the State to ensure that racial equity is a priority in the decision-making process for prioritizing new investments.
- **Model the cost to get to a state of adequate funding, including determining human capital recruitment and capacity building strategies and their costs.** The new early childhood state agency must prioritize developing the needed early childhood workforce and capacity for services. There will be a need for a significantly larger workforce to support an expansion of early childhood services, including many early childhood professionals with special certifications such as bilingual or trauma-informed practice, but higher education as a sector is already strained. The State should create a plan to rapidly certify and train quality staff that eases the burden on communities and providers to comply with quality standards. Community systems including early childhood collaborations and other similar entities who are being asked to play a role that they have never had to do before and on a scale they have never had to before will require resources and support.
- **Set benchmarks to monitor implementation progress over time.** Racial equity requires racially disaggregated data to guide implementation and evaluation of policy to ensure the production of equitable outcomes. Identify benchmarks that would indicate that the state is increasing racial equity in its service outcomes, such as those described in the section of this report on high-level observations.

Recommendation on funding mechanisms: *Public early childhood education and care funding allocation and disbursement should be centralized at the state level.*

Items the Commission should address

- **Provide greater specificity to accurately assess community and administrative infrastructure needs.** Some areas of the state may need facilities construction or renovation, technical help, or

other services to build community infrastructure for early childhood education and care services. The funding mechanism recommendation should describe more specifically how funding for these costs will be allocated and disbursed. If this is not possible at this time, a plan for scoping those costs should be developed during implementation.

- **Design funding distribution for the flexibility of changing family needs.** The State should evaluate the disparate impacts of its copay recommendations on different populations and/or explore the Head Start model where eligibility is applicable for multiple years even if a family's income changes so the child can stay in the program. Flexibility allows providers to help parents pay for immediate needs that emerge such as for food, housing, and health services. As seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, families' needs can change dramatically from one month to the next and providers need the ability to flex some funding to help meet those needs.
- **Revise the Early Learning Council's priority populations list to explicitly promote racial equity.** The list of priority populations from the Early Learning Council is a good starting point for identifying groups that have largely been underserved by the current early childhood education and care system. However, the list does not include language about race/ethnicity and is not inclusive of other groups who have been underserved by the early childhood system. The State needs to adapt the list of priority populations and use the list to inform funding to serve those facing the greatest need.

Items that must be addressed in implementation

- **Create racial equity-based criteria for funding eligibility and priority.** As funding needed to reach adequacy will not all become available immediately, who gets what services first could be inequitable if done without intention. The State must identify funding criteria that will increase equity in service outcomes. This is as important as developing criteria for where to invest increases in funding to move toward the funding adequacy estimate; here, it is important to explicitly identify priority regions of the state, or types of providers, or communities that will be targeted for funding distribution.

The State should prioritize services, geographies, populations, and age cohorts that have the greatest disparities in access and quality when identifying areas for new investments. The State should also build IT and data systems that allow for data analysis by race to support decision-making that promotes racial equity. Ultimately, the State must simultaneously invest in expanding access to high-quality early childhood services and building infrastructure and capacity to ensure success in those expanded services.

- **Ensure accessibility by involving providers in Request for Proposal (RFP) development.** Prior to writing the Request for Proposal for funding distribution, the State should engage providers to better understand the challenges they face in responding to State RFPs and identify how to make the RFP process accessible, accommodating, and equitable. If done without intention, this RFP could exacerbate inequities. For instance, the current funding mechanism can disproportionately benefit large or politically connected providers. Implementing the funding mechanism recommendations must accommodate all provider types. Ideas raised by

participants included removing barriers to entry like needing a grant writer, simplifying the RFP, instituting blind review of the application process, certifying providers, and providing funding for technical assistance for providers (particularly those who do not speak English, are not computer trained, are undocumented, etc. so there is a diverse make-up of who receives grants). Illinois could look to other states for ideas; for example, some states have provided staff to help communities write proposals and to support providers in an ongoing way beyond being awarded funding.

- **Examine strategies to certify providers.** A certification process for providers could simplify the funding allocation process. A mix between a strengths-based evaluation of providers and needs defined by the community can help ensure a future RFP is focused on equity. Certain data elements on the RFP could be used to identify need for funding without inequitably focusing on a provider's ability to write a grant proposal, such as zip codes.
- **Further specify the role that community-level entities, such as community collaborations, will play in accessing and distributing funds and services.** Communities with local infrastructure, such as community collaborations, are better positioned to access and effectively use resources. As the State provides resources to support local infrastructure and capacity building, the State should also work in partnership with communities to identify the functions that local entities should play in supporting equitable access to high-quality early childhood services. Functions could include planning, provider support, family and community engagement, coordinated intake for services, and facilitation of local decision-making related to early childhood policy.
- **Examine how the recommendations will affect union issues in the workforce.** With such an influx of funding and allocation process changes, proactive discussions with all impacted collective bargaining units can allow for more inclusive design and may avoid future conflicts.
- **Identify provider impacts statewide.** Identifying and addressing how expanded funding distribution could burden or exclude current providers may look different across the state.
- **Create a framework for evaluating contract performance.** To ensure services are effective, contract performance needs to be evaluated. If contracts are offered for multiple years, accountability mechanisms need to be built in to ensure quality persists over the contract period. In addition, recipients of funding should be provided with technical assistance and other supports to help them to successfully meet the performance requirements of their contract.
- **Mandate service types based on need.** Guidelines should be defined for services based on local needs (e.g., bilingual service availability). If a portion of a local population needs a specific service, providers must accommodate those needs in their proposal responses. The State should work directly with communities to identify which services must be provided to families in that community and should then structure the RFP for that community to require those services.
- **Prioritize continued support for Illinois' mixed delivery early childhood education and care system to preserve parent choice.** Illinois has a history of prioritizing and valuing parent choice

in early childhood. The funding mechanism should be targeted to ensure that communities are able to offer high-quality services in families' own communities, including in providers' homes, in community-based centers, and in schools. The funding mechanism should not be so restrictive that it doesn't allow for a breadth of different program models and curriculum types. Further, the funding mechanism should value and prioritize support for providers that are representative of the families and communities they serve, including racial/ethnic representation. The funding mechanism should provide training, technical assistance, capacity building, professional development, and other supports to strengthen these providers. Finally, the funding mechanism should be designed with a recognition that capacity building and program incubation and start-up takes many years to be successful, and therefore requires a sustained funding commitment.

- **Create an outreach and support plan for underserved communities during the transition, and adequately resource its execution.** Underserved and capacity constrained communities will likely experience a burden during a structural change. To proactively address this risk, dedicated state agency staff need to be trained to support communities during the transition to a new state agency to navigate enrollment processes under a new mechanism of funding.

Recommendation on management and oversight in implementation: *Early childhood education and care services should be centralized in a new state agency.*

Items the Commission should address

- **Accommodate co-creation of state agency.** A new agency must be stood up with collaborative input from communities and in a way that will continue that collaboration in agency operations. This Commission recommendation should state that a diverse set of parents and providers from around the state should be involved in standing up the new state agency through participation on an implementation steering committee and an equity council for the agency. The agency's start-up investments should include statewide community and stakeholder engagement so that the agency can better understand the strengths and needs of the current early childhood education and care system at the community level and structure the agency to best support families and providers.
- **Create a new accountability office.** This Commission recommendation should include establishment of an accountability office as part of the new agency along with oversight from regional and local stakeholders. See more information about this recommendation in the section of this report on high-level observations. This office should work directly with Illinois State Board of Education for a smooth transition into the K-12 system.

Items that must be addressed in implementation

- **Build the capacity of local boards or advisory bodies.** If the State is shifting some decision-making power to local communities, there will need to be some sort of local governance structure established. During implementation it will be important to identify the boards and advisory bodies that must be created as well as the development costs that must be included in the funding allocation to support them. The new agency must also identify and delineate which governance capacities will be fulfilled by the State and which will be fulfilled by community entities; the latter must then be provided with funding to do that work.

- **Build the capacity of state agency staff.** In the new state agency, staff will be arriving from multiple different agency cultures with varying interpretations and perspectives on how to best promote racial equity in early childhood. To create a unified, cohesive culture focused on the items included in this report, it will be imperative to train and support state agency staff so that they, in turn, can best support children and communities of color. The new agency must explicitly identify the roles, responsibilities, and accountability for leadership and coordination, and must identify talent and leadership with the disposition, skills, mindset, and track record to focus on racial equity and achieve racial equity outcomes.
- **Collaborate with state, regional, and local agencies to address service alignment.** While having one agency to deal with applications and guidance will help providers, there is a risk that the specific needs addressed by the current ecosystem of state agencies may be left behind. A new centralized state agency needs to create a change management plan for how it will ensure all populations have their needs evaluated and addressed and that there are not significant service disruptions for families. The State must determine how existing services can effectively transition to a new agency while maintaining and improving quality. A new state agency must align standards, communication, and workforce development and recruitment; however, it must do so in a way that prioritizes support for providers to move toward newly aligned standards and improve their quality. This is especially critical in areas with fewer providers and areas without enough providers who represent the racial/ethnic makeup of the community. As an example, the State should create incentives for school districts to collaborate with community partners to build and sustain partnerships across school- and community-based early childhood services and across the transition to kindergarten.
- **The Governor must demonstrate a commitment to racial equity as the basis for creating a new state early childhood agency.** This new agency should rely on the Governor's Chief Diversity Officer (once hired) to inform the development of the new agency and its connections to other partner agencies. If the new agency creates its own equity office, that role and team must be intentionally defined and must come with a mandate to act.
- **Implementation efforts must include a focus on evaluating equity throughout the implementation process.** This includes tracking and documenting impact and beneficiaries throughout the adoption and implementation of Commission recommendations; evaluation of how funds were spent, how they align to outputs and outcomes, and where gaps remain; and community-level evaluations of continuous quality improvement and family experience over time. The state should ensure that all outcomes measures are disaggregated by race, especially as policy changes are implemented, to determine disparate effects. This work should be done in partnership with the state's incoming Chief Diversity Officer, with the Early Learning Council's Family Advisory Committee, and with representatives from communities across the state.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Chicago United for Equity's Racial Equity Impact Assessment Tool

For this project, a series of facilitated discussions with CUE fellows, parents, providers, and the Racial Equity Working Group were held. Questions were adapted from Steps 3 and 4 of [CUE's REIA tool](#).



WHAT IS AN REIA?

A Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) is a set of questions to investigate the benefits and burdens of a policy or practice.

STEP 1: DETERMINE OUTCOMES AND STAKEHOLDERS.

- Q1. What is the policy and what problem is it trying to solve?
- Q2. What other issues can this proposal impact?
- Q3. Who are the key groups impacted by this issue?
- Q4. How will these groups be involved in decision-making?

STEP 2: LOOK AT NUMBERS AND NARRATIVES.

- Q5. What data will we collect and look at? Why?
- Q6. Where do we see disparities in the numbers?
- Q7. What can we learn from histories and narratives to better understand these numbers?
- Q8. What questions still remain? What information do we wish we had?

STEP 3: MEASURE BENEFITS AND BURDENS.

- Q9. What are the benefits and who is most likely to receive them?
- Q10. What are the burdens and who is most likely to bear them?
- Q11. What are different options to make this policy racially equitable?

STEP 4: EVALUATE AND BE ACCOUNTABLE.

- Q12. How will we evaluate the impacts of your solution?
- Q13. How will our stakeholders engage in ensuring equitable outcomes?
- Q14. How will we report back on these outcomes?
- Q15. How will our evaluation impact improvements to the policy?

Adapted from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE)'s "Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity." Find resources at our website www.chicagounitedforequity.org

APPENDIX B: Priority Populations¹²

While these priority populations come from the Early Learning Council, Black, Indigenous, and other children and families of color must also be prioritized due to a history of being underserved by institutions and systems. As children and families have multiple identities, they may fall into multiple priority populations at different points in time. Other stakeholders not included in the original list from the Early Learning Council are in italics and came from participants in the facilitated discussions.

- Direct Impact
 - Children of teen parents
 - Children experiencing homelessness
 - Children in families in poverty or deep poverty
 - Children/families with Department of Children and Family Services involvement
 - Children with disabilities
 - Children of migrant or seasonal workers
 - Children in families with low caregiver education attainment
 - Children in families that face barriers based on culture, language, and religion
 - Children of a parent or legal guardian with a disability
 - Children/families with refugee or asylum status
 - Children in families who face barriers due to immigration status
 - *Children outside of licensed environments (schools, centers, homes)*
 - *Children from marginalized racial groups*
 - *Providers who serve priority populations¹³*
- Secondary impact
 - *Providers (schools, community-based centers, and homes and including non-profit and for-profit providers)*
 - *Early childhood professionals (lead teachers, assistant teachers, aides, paraprofessionals, child care workers, home visitors, early interventionists, others)*
 - *People in underserved community areas*
 - *Majority non-white communities*
 - *Before and aftercare providers*
- Community impact
 - *School districts*
 - *Community based organizations (networks)*
 - *Museums, libraries, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), other community institutions*

¹² Access Committee - All Families Served Subcommittee of the Early Learning Council. Recommendation on Priority Populations February 2019.

¹³ The Racial Equity Working Group elected to include these specific providers as directly impacted after significant discussion. The group determined that these providers should be prioritized but should be prioritized secondary to the children listed above them.

APPENDIX C: Impact of Recommendations

The recommendations have the possibility to affect many sectors and groups outside of early childhood alone. In examining the impact of the recommendations, participants largely agreed on what the recommendations could have a direct impact on (dark blue) and what it could have an indirect or neutral impact on (light blue) in the table below; impact could be positive or negative depending on implementation. This was explored due to the fact that while work is often done in silos, impacts can be wide ranging.

There were a few possible impacts that were raised in particular focus groups. Parents brought up that with the recommendation for the cost model, the investment would open up options for parents for culturally responsive services wherever they want. For example, those who need a bilingual speech language pathologist or want bilingual programs for their children will be able to access them in their own communities. Providers brought up potential positive and negative impacts of recommendations including fear that school-based programs would push out community-based programs, hope for closing the divide between home-based and center-based as well as bringing in more home-based, hope for aligned standards and more consistent communication, and hope for the ability to recruit a highly qualified workforce that is adequately and fairly compensated.

Children & Youth	Community Engagement	Contracting Equity	Criminal Justice	Education
Food Access & Affordability	Government Practices	Health	Housing	Human Services
Jobs	Planning & Economic Development	Transportation	Utilities	Workforce Equity

APPENDIX D: Benefits and Burdens

In CUE's Racial Equity Impact Assessment tool, the third step focuses on measurement of benefits and burdens. Specifically, participants are asked, "what are the benefits of this proposal and who is most likely to receive them?" and "what are the burdens of this proposal and who is most likely to bear them?" This process is not designed to call out winners and losers in a proposal that might not be zero sum, but rather to focus on whether a proposal may harm certain groups in a way that perpetuates racial disparities and inequity. Another way of asking these questions may be to consider potential positive and negative impacts of a proposal.

Recommendation on funding goals: The cost to provide equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and care is \$11.7 billion in public funds.

The focus groups considered benefits and burdens associated with the recommendation:

Who benefits from the recommendation?	Who is burdened by the recommendation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone • Children & families (particularly priority populations) • Families with low incomes • Families with undocumented status • Providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State services in need of funding (e.g., K-12) • Taxpayers (burdens vary between income levels as Illinois has a flat tax rate) • Education institutions (who educate providers) • Other taxing entities • Philanthropic community • Taxpayers without children who may not see the value of these services

The Racial Equity Working Group considered potential positive and negative impacts associated with the recommendation, and the conditions that must be met in order for those impacts to come to fruition:

Who will be impacted and how?	What will these impacts depend on?
Benefit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children, families, and providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority populations • Children in zip codes without services • Children not connected to ECEC services • Undocumented families • Those experiencing racial or economic disparities • The early childhood workforce • Communities needing coordinated services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It depends on implementation, resource allocation • It depends on a community's capacity to effectively address identified needs, which requires funding. The State must model the cost necessary to move toward the adequacy model. • Access and quality must be determined with beneficiary input. • A communications campaign for increased public funds is needed. • Parent choice must be valued. • We will have equity when all children are served regardless of zip code. • We need benchmarks for prioritizing who receives new funding. • Identify access gaps and barriers.
Burden: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxpayers • Diverse learners • Dual language learners • Black and brown children • Providers (cost of quality care, need to meet standards before becoming eligible for funding, potential increased credential requirements, structural imbalance in current fees) • The early childhood workforce • Family child care providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse learners, dual language learners, and Black and brown children will be burdened if those groups are not defined and prioritized. • It depends on how additional cost burden will be shared across taxpayers. The burden could fall heavier on middle- and low-income taxpayers if taxes are raised to meet this funding goal and there is no graduated income tax. • Regulations and regulating bodies must align. • Barriers to eligibility must be removed. • Allocations must align with provider operating costs. • Calculate the cost necessary to grow the workforce and support family child care with hubs and back office supports.

Recommendation on funding mechanisms: Public early childhood education and care funding allocation and disbursement should be centralized at the state level.

The focus groups considered benefits and burdens associated with the recommendation:

Who benefits from the recommendation?	Who is burdened by the recommendation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers navigating changes to funding distribution

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and recipients – if access to services improves Impacted state agencies with opportunity to streamline funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers without the resources (e.g., grant writer, technology), training, or know-how to access a new state application Burden could be placed on stakeholders depending on the flexibility and responsiveness of funding – who gets funding first Special education service funding Wealthy communities with low demand
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The Racial Equity Working Group considered potential positive and negative impacts associated with the recommendation, and the conditions that must be met in order for those impacts to come to fruition:

Who will be impacted and how?	What will these impacts depend on?
Benefit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers will benefit from administrative cost savings, streamlined financial processes, inclusion of provider voice, and stable and consistent income Families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a blind review of the application process. Ensure funding follows the child. Some funds should remain unrestricted to respond to unique community needs. Benefits and accountability depend on state investments in state infrastructure (e.g., state IT systems).
Burden: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The early childhood workforce Providers will be burdened by increased accountability Local providers could go out of business, especially if they don't have grant writers or aren't plugged in to state communications State agency staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources must be provided to the workforce (especially educators of color and educators in poverty) for professional development. Current barriers in the professional and workforce development system disadvantage staff of color. Funding allocations must be sufficient for providers to hire the workforce they need to deliver quality services. Prioritize funding for facilities and infrastructure at the community level. Increase system efficiency while considering different needs and capacities of providers and communities.

Recommendation on management and oversight in implementation: Early childhood education and care services should be centralized in a new state agency.

The focus groups considered benefits and burdens associated with the recommendation:

Who benefits from the recommendation?	Who is burdened by the recommendation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents – depending on implementation Children whose needs are not adequately resourced or prioritized throughout the system Children and families with multiple service needs – simplify case management Providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents – depending on implementation Children whose needs are not adequately resourced or prioritized State agencies who face a more complex future process New state agency capacity Providers who may face new or different standards

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers evaluated by the state could be impacted by cultural responsiveness of requirements • Jobs potentially lost in restructuring
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The Racial Equity Working Group considered potential positive and negative impacts associated with the recommendation, and the conditions that must be met in order for those impacts to come to fruition:

Who will be impacted and how?	What will these impacts depend on?
<p><i>Benefit:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers, families, and communities, because there will be one place for them to go for support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to know how accountability will be evaluated, and it must include beneficiary voice. • We need to measure the success of centralization based on how it impacts priority populations.
<p><i>Burden:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State agencies and their staff will have to manage the transition and continue collaborating with other state agencies • Providers: due to the transition, because agency infrastructure won't resolve the silos in the system, and because blended funding from more than one source gives providers more flexibility. • School-based providers may be less interested in aligning early childhood and K-12 if school-based early childhood is not housed in ISBE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture change in the transition, at the state and local level, will determine who is burdened. • Leaders must be funded and have the capacity and authority to coordinate across programs to help families access services. • A new state agency needs sufficient staff to make the transition and change culture. • We need regional and local entities, serving different purposes, to connect to a centralized state agency to maintain community systems structures. This must be funded to build and maintain capacity and should be a priority investment. • Support and incentivize school districts in prioritizing early childhood. Create an accountability mechanism for early childhood.