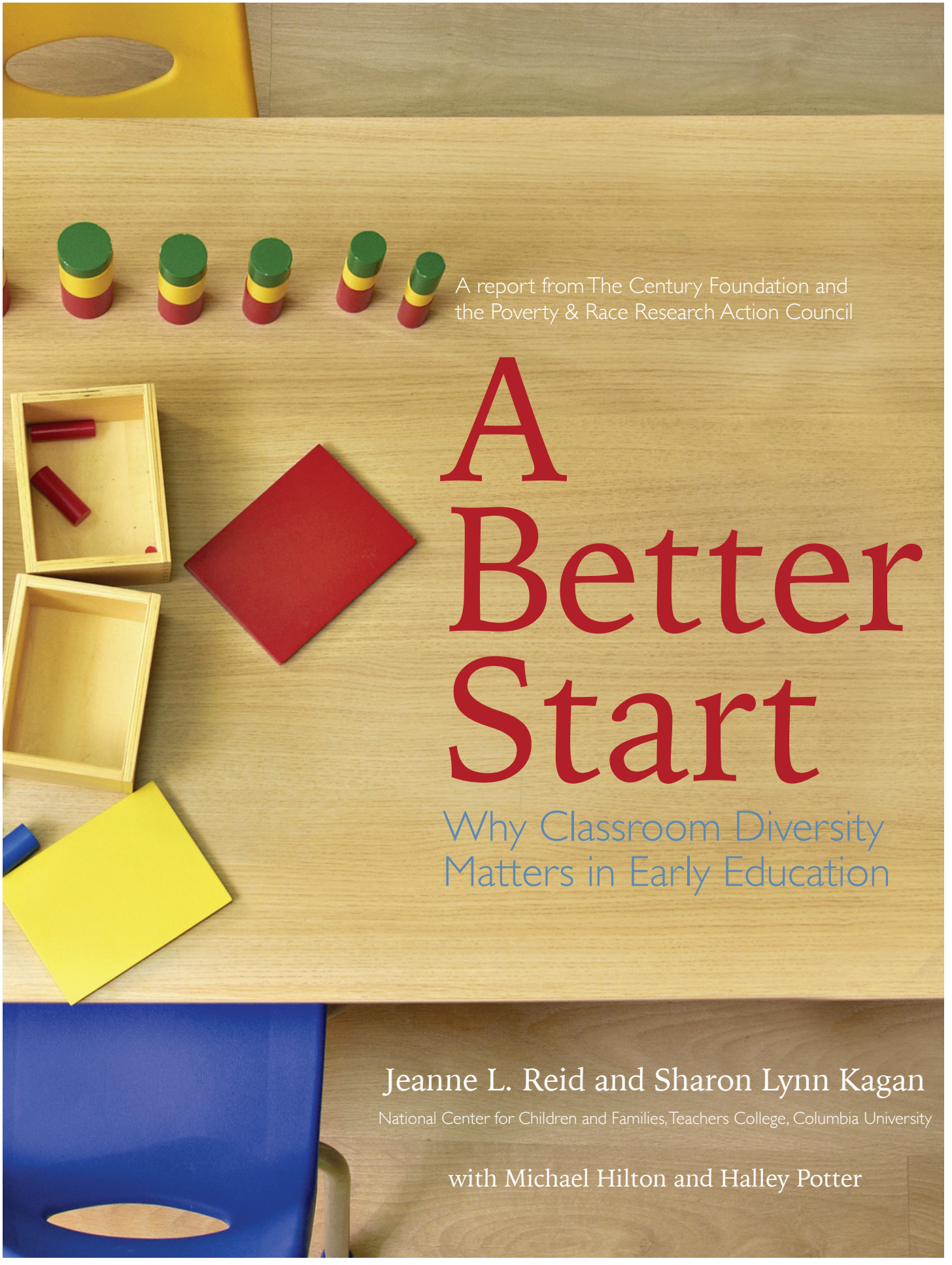

A report from The Century Foundation and the Poverty & Race Research Action Council

A Better Start

Why Classroom Diversity Matters in Early Education

Jeanne L. Reid and Sharon Lynn Kagan

National Center for Children and Families, Teachers College, Columbia University

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THE CENTURY FOUNDATION

PRRAC
Poverty & Race Research Action Council

This research was supported by The Century Foundation and the Poverty & Race Research Action Council and led by Jeanne L. Reid and Sharon Lynn Kagan of the National Center for Children and Families, Teachers College, Columbia University.

About the Poverty & Race Research Action Council

The Poverty & Race Research Action Council (PRRAC) is a civil rights policy organization convened by major civil rights, civil liberties, and anti-poverty groups in 1989. PRRAC's primary mission is to help connect advocates with social scientists working on race and poverty issues, and to promote a research-based advocacy strategy on structural inequality issues. PRRAC sponsors social science research, provides technical assistance, and convenes advocates and researchers around particular race and poverty issues. PRRAC also supports public education efforts, including the bimonthly newsletter/journal Poverty & Race, and the award-winning civil rights history curriculum guide, Putting the Movement Back Into Civil Rights Teaching (co-published with Teaching for Change). PRRAC is a founding member of the National Coalition on School Diversity.

About The Century Foundation

The Century Foundation is a progressive nonpartisan think tank. Originally known as the Twentieth Century Fund, it was founded in 1919 and initially endowed by Edward Filene, a leading Republican businessman and champion of fair workplaces and employee ownership strategies, all with an eye to ensuring that economic opportunity is available to all. Today, TCF issues analyses and convenes and promotes the best thinkers and thinking across a range of public policy questions. Its work today focuses on issues of equity and opportunity in the United States, and how American values can be best sustained and advanced in a world of more diffuse power.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The field of early childhood education is experiencing unprecedented public investment accompanied by increasing expectations for enhanced child outcomes. To achieve such outcomes, policymakers must consider the socioeconomic and racial/ethnic composition of children's classrooms as an important component of preschool quality.

This report presents the results of a review and analysis of demographic data, current research, and position statements of national early childhood organizations, emphasizing the following findings. The demographic data reveal troubling racial/ethnic and economic disparities in preschool enrollment and in the quality of preschool that children experience, which beckon policy changes to provide all families with access to affordable, high-quality preschool options. Among families who do enroll, most children attend classrooms that are homogenous in family income, and often in race/ethnicity as well.

The research on the distinct benefits of higher-SES and racially diverse classrooms in early childhood provides a foundation for the development of policies and practices that encourage and support diversity in preschool classrooms. In particular, findings from emerging research on preschool classroom composition, which are consistent with multiple studies on school composition in kindergarten and elementary school and on peer effects in preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school, make a compelling case for reconsidering current preschool policy and practice.

The position statements of leading national organizations working on early childhood issues do not include diversity within schools or classrooms as a specific goal for young children, though one does call for integrated classrooms more generally. We call on the organizations to exercise leadership in advancing the goal of racially and economically diverse preschool classrooms as an important option for families with young children. Finally, two examples of diverse preschools are presented to demonstrate how diversity works in practice.

We argue that quality and equity are inextricably linked, that programs that are segregated by race/ethnicity and income are rarely of equal quality, and that efforts to make early childhood investments sustainable must take this into account.

Specific recommendations are offered in the following areas:

Build Public and Professional Knowledge.
We call upon government, foundations, researchers, professional organizations, and advocates to mobilize and communicate the available data and research findings, using diverse sources to reach diverse audiences. We also call for increasing the research base regarding classroom diversity.

Increase Funding.
To support efforts to enhance school and classroom diversity, we recommend pursuing state and/or federal funding initiatives using multiple funding sources. One option is to create an "equity" set-aside in current early education funding, parallel to the concept of the "quality" set-asides in Head Start and Child Care Development Block Grant funding, to support classroom integration.

Consider Location and Subsidize Transportation.
When considering which programs to support, policymakers should advance programs that reside in or close to socioeconomically and racially diverse neighborhoods, in addition to those in low-income neighborhoods. At the same time, the predominance of residential segregation requires that policymakers assure that families have access to affordable transportation to diverse programs.

Strengthen Professional Development.
Because teachers are critically important to the quality of children's preschool experience, the increasing diversity of the children they serve demands that teachers have the capacity to teach effectively in diverse classrooms. We call on states, higher education and postgraduate education schools, and foundations to increase attention to classroom diversity in early childhood education (ECE) teacher preparation efforts.

Support Enrollment and Engagement.
Program administrators and teachers need to recruit and engage diverse families as valued members of the preschool community. We call on policymakers and program administrators to support family outreach and recruitment efforts, and the engagement of families in their children's preschool experience.

Introduction: A Critical Moment in Early Education

Never in the history of early childhood development and education has so much attention been accorded young children. Increased public discourse and new public policies have led to programs and services emerging throughout the country. In many cases, these initiatives provide direct services to children as well as the physical and social infrastructure (capacity development, governance, and accountability structures) that supports these services. Moreover, this interest and investment has been matched by global efforts to include early education in policy documents and global frameworks, including the Millennium Development Goals. How did this burgeoning interest in early childhood development come to be, and are societies fully capitalizing on the opportunity such attention affords?

Many experts attribute this surge of interest in early childhood development to new knowledge in the field of neuroscience. With the advent of neuro-imaging, brain plasticity has become evident—as has the importance of capturing and advancing the potential inherent in the earliest years of life. Scientists also point to robust data that attest to the potency of high-quality early education on children's short- and long-term development and their readiness for school. And economists readily acknowledge that early education is a proven cost-saving intervention, perhaps the most important social investment any society can make. In reality, it is the confluence of all these data, widely popularized by solid public information campaigns, that now renders early childhood a prominent position on the public agenda.

Now that early childhood education (ECE) has penetrated the policy agenda and its contributions are clear, it is time to shift the discourse from the *why* to one that addresses the *how* of early childhood education. More specifically, it is time to focus next generation discourse on the parameters needed to mount early education programs that are of sufficient *quality* to produce improvements in children's learning and development, of sufficient *sustainability* to ensure that early education becomes a durable feature of the policy landscape, and of sufficient *equity* to reduce the widening learning and achievement gaps that characterize American education. In other words, it is time to focus on how to achieve excellent, sustained, and equitable early childhood efforts.

Some of this conversation on public investment in early care and education has already begun. Data on what constitutes *quality* early childhood education abounds, with scholarship affirming that group size, adult-child ratios, use of curricula, and most importantly, interactions between educators and young children matter unequivocally. The existence of early learning standards, child-centered pedagogy, formative assessment, and comprehensive services are also critically important. Increasingly, definitions of quality education are embracing systemic elements that include the way early childhood efforts are governed, financed, held accountable, and foster meaningful parent engagement and effective transition supports. Such agreement, however, does not mask a plethora of lingering quality questions in the field: Can we have standards without standardization? How are home cultures and values best incorporated while maintaining fidelity to specified program goals?

What is the requisite amount of training needed to prepare teachers of high quality? Is "quality" the same for all children and for all ages of children? And amid this discourse, the question of whether the demographic composition of children's classrooms is a component of preschool quality deserves careful attention.

Less abundant, but present nonetheless, are efforts to address the *sustainability* of new early childhood efforts. No longer regarded as an intermittent passion of some elected officials, early childhood education is increasingly being conceptualized as an essential element of the public good, a service that is both a child's right and a necessary social obligation. Such reframing is accompanied by comprehensive and visionary planning, wherein early childhood services embrace health and nutrition, and extend for multiple years, not multiple months. Attention is also being accorded to the development of durable supports for families with young children. The focus on improving and sustaining services for young children and their families has increased considerably, resulting in public policies such as the Early Learning Challenge Fund (ELCF), the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and Head Start, and in scores of programs supported by the philanthropic and corporate sectors.

Sadly, however, we have not seen similar progress regarding *equity*. While the issue of equity has animated the K–12 policy narrative for decades, it has been less deeply considered in early childhood education. This is odd, given the reality that early childhood education as a public service reached national prominence with the Head Start program as part of the War on Poverty, followed by concerted efforts to reduce economic inequity among poor children. Despite this, issues of racial and socioeconomic equity have only been tangentially tackled with the result that many programs effectively isolate children by income, and often in practice, by race.

This report seeks to address this policy deficit by presenting what is known regarding racial and socioeconomic diversity in ECE classrooms, and by discerning diversity's contribution to the quality of preschool programs, the sustainability of preschool investments, and the equity of preschool choices available to families with young children. It summarizes the demographics and research literature, and provides the results of a survey of the position statements of national ECE organizations regarding diversity within preschool classrooms. To complement this information, it presents examples of how diversity works in ECE programs. Finally, it offers recommendations for research, policy, and practice regarding classroom diversity in preschool.

In addressing issues of diversity from different perspectives, we aim to elevate it to a level of discourse and commitment commensurate with that currently being accorded the quality and sustainability of early childhood services. Indeed, we argue that quality and equity are inextricably linked: programs that are segregated by race/ethnicity and income are rarely, if ever, of equal quality, and efforts to make early childhood investments sustainable must take this fact into account. Our stance is that, without attention to excellence, sustainability, *and* equity, the country cannot hope to capitalize on the present opportunity being afforded early childhood education as it anticipates robust expansion and enhanced efficacy.

What We Know about Racial and Economic Diversity in Early Childhood Education

Public investment and enrollment in preschool programs has increased dramatically over the past decade, with most of the rise coming in state pre-K programs. In 2012–13, 1.3 million three- and four-year-olds attended state pre-K programs, at a total cost of $5.4 billion.[1] That is twice the number of children that were enrolled a decade ago, and more than double the level of funding.[2] By comparison, the federal Head Start program served about 900,000 three-, four-, and five-year-olds and their families in 2013–14, at a cost of $7.3 billion, and enrollment and funding have been relatively stable over the past decade.[3]

Defining Preschool

Much of data on classroom diversity emanates from state pre-K or Head Start programs, and so this report focuses on these two delivery streams. To describe them, we use the terms preschool and early education programs interchangeably in this brief. We recognize, however, that there are many other types of early childhood arrangements, including center-based and family-based child care.

Despite these increases in preschool program enrollment, however, we know very little about the socioeconomic and racial/ethnic diversity of the early education classrooms in which young children spend their days. Even less attention has been focused on if and how such classroom diversity affects children's learning. In an attempt to address this paucity, we will look at: (1) what we know from demographic data about children in public preschool programs and classrooms, (2) what we know from research on children who attend schools and classrooms of different racial/ethnic and economic composition, and (3) what we know from statements of national early childhood organizations regarding the integration of children from diverse backgrounds in preschool programs and classrooms.

What We Know from the Demographics

As the number of children who attend early education programs has increased in recent years, a growing list of empirical studies has demonstrated decisively that high-quality preschool can have substantial positive effects on children's early learning and development.[4] Research also indicates that the quality of preschool programs influences how much children benefit, and that children from low-income families tend to benefit the most from high-quality programs.[5] These results on the efficacy of high-quality preschool underscore the need to promote equal access to such programs.

Unfortunately, the demographic data on early childhood education programs reveal three troubling trends: (1) children from low-SES families and Hispanic children are less likely than high-SES and non-Hispanic children to be enrolled in center-based early childhood programs; (2) low-income children are most likely to attend low-quality preschool programs; and (3) most children in public preschool programs attend economically segregated programs that are often segregated by race/ethnicity as well.

Who Goes to Preschool?

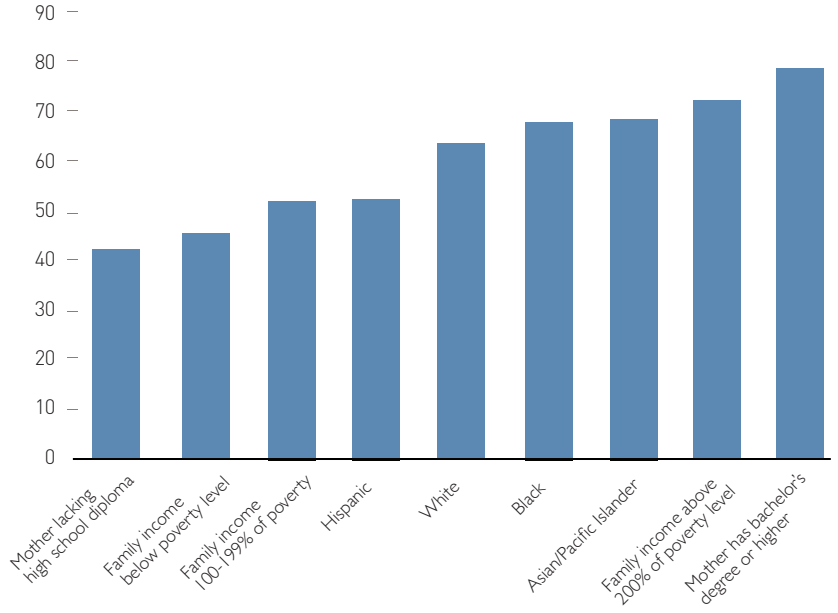
Although participation in center-based programs has been rising, the data reveal disparities in participation based on children's race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES). Children from low-SES families and Hispanic families are less likely than high-SES and non-Hispanic children to be enrolled in center-based early childhood programs.[6]

Two components of SES (family income and maternal education), as well as race and ethnicity, directly relate to children's enrollment in early childhood programs. In 2012, only 45.6 percent of children from families with incomes below the poverty line attended center-based programs (including pre-K, Head Start, and center-based child care).[7] For children from families making 100–199 percent of the poverty line, enrollment was slightly higher, at 51.8 percent, and for families making at least twice the poverty threshold, enrollment rose to 72 percent. At the same time, children whose mothers had bachelor's degrees or higher were almost twice as likely as those whose mothers had less than a high school diploma to attend such center-based early childhood programs (79.4 percent versus 42.7 percent). The data also reveal disparities by race and ethnicity: 63.5 percent of white children, 68.4 percent of black children, and 68.4 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander children attended such center-based programs in 2012, compared to only 51.9 percent of Hispanic children. (See Figure 1.) Together, these data suggest that many of the children who could most benefit from high-quality preschool are not enrolled.

Who Gets High Quality?

The importance of high-quality preschool to children's short- and long-term educational outcomes is beyond dispute. But, sadly, the overall quality of American preschool is low. In 2012–13, for example,

Figure 1.
Percentage of children attending center-based preschool, by various indicators



Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, America's Children: Key National Indicators of Wellbeing, 2014, Table Fam3B (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2014), http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/fam3b.asp?popup=true.

more than half a million children in state pre-K programs—41 percent of nationwide enrollment—were enrolled in programs that met fewer than half of the quality benchmarks set by the National Institute for Early Education Research.[8] The problem is compounded for low-SES families because they have limited access to quality services.[9] Although the quality of pre-K programs varies, those serving high numbers of children living in poverty and racial/ethnic minorities are the most likely to be low in quality.[10]

Additionally, quality in Head Start classrooms (a program designed for low-income children) is uneven. In the aggregate, a randomized evaluation of Head Start found modest, but statistically significant improvements in children's language, cognitive skills, and school-related behaviors, and the results put Head Start on par with good child-care programs.[11] But when compared with pre-K programs, Head Start has not compared favorably on a range of cognitive, language, and social-emotional outcomes in the short run.[12] Moreover, the instructional quality of Head Start classrooms tends to be low: a 2010 study found that 96 percent of Head Start classrooms scored in the low range (1 to 2 points) on a 7-point scale measuring instructional support.[13] Even so, attending higher-quality Head Start programs has been associated with positive long-term outcomes for enrollees.[14] Clearly, given the findings on both pre-K and Head Start programs, access to high-quality early education for all children is not the norm.

How Diverse Are Programs and Classrooms?

As states have expanded access, the cohorts of children attending early education programs have become remarkably diverse, mirroring the unprecedented diversity of young children in the country as a whole. In 2012, the U. S. Census Bureau announced that for the first time, more than half (50.4 percent) of the children in the country under age five were racial/ethnic minorities (that is, race/ethnicities other than non-Hispanic white), challenging the very notion of their "minority" status.[15]

This increasing diversity among young children is clearly reflected in public preschool programs. In a 2001–03 sample of 2,966 children from eleven state pre-K programs, 59 percent of the children represented a racial/ethnic minority.[16] About one out of four was Hispanic (27 percent); one out of five was black (18 percent); and 3 percent were Asian; 11 percent were "other"; the balance (41 percent) was non-Hispanic white. In terms of family income, about half of the total (49.2 percent) were from families with incomes of $25,000 or below; a quarter (25.4 percent) came from families with incomes from $25,001 to $45,000; and another quarter (25.4 percent) came from families with incomes above $45,000, representing a surprising level of diversity in both race/ethnicity and family income. While this data is over ten years old, as access has expanded to pre-K programs, the diversity of enrolled children may well have increased.

Yet, this diversity in *preschool programs overall* does not always translate into diversity within *preschool classrooms*. Many children have been clustered in pre-K classrooms that are both high-minority and high-poverty. In the 2001–03 sample, almost half (47.1 percent) of the children attended high-minority classrooms (70 to 100 percent minority), in which, on average, three out of four (75.4 percent) of the children were poor.[17] Just over a quarter (29.7 percent) attended classrooms that were predominantly white (less than 30 percent minority). Fewer children were in pre-K classrooms that displayed some racial/ethnic and economic diversity. Just under a quarter (23.2 percent) attended racially diverse classrooms (30 percent to 70 percent minority), and only a narrow slice (17.0 percent) were enrolled in classrooms that were *both* racially diverse and medium- or high-income.[18] While the classroom diversity in these pre-K programs is surprising and perhaps groundbreaking, it is more the exception than the rule.

Overall enrollment in Head Start programs is also racially and ethnically diverse, though in accord with Head Start policy, far less heterogeneous by family income. In 2012–13, 37.6 percent of children in Head Start were Hispanic (of any race), roughly mirroring the percentage of children in poverty ages three to five who were Hispanic.[19] Broken down by race, overall Head Start enrollment was 41.7 percent white, 29.5 percent black or African American, 3.8 percent American Indian/Alaska Native, 1.8 percent Asian, 0.6 percent Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 9.2 percent biracial or multiracial, and 13.4 percent unspecified/other.[20] National data on the racial/ethnic composition of Head Start *classrooms*, however, are not publicly available.

By design, Head Start serves economically disadvantaged students, including children living in poverty or foster care, those who are experiencing homelessness, or those who have disabilities. Federal law does create the possibility for some economic diversity by allowing each Head Start program to enroll up to 10 percent of its children from families that have incomes above the poverty line; programs may also serve up to an additional 35 percent of children from families whose incomes are between 100 percent and 130 percent of the poverty line, as long as enrollment of families below poverty has been fully met.[21] Yet while Head Start creates the potential for such diversity with these options, the pursuit of diversity is often compromised by pressure to serve the lowest-income children first. In 2012–13, just 5.1 percent of Head Start children nationwide had family incomes that were 100–130 percent of the poverty line, and only 2.5 percent came from families earning more than 130 percent of the poverty line.[22]

A formidable obstacle faced by preschool programs that seek to serve socioeconomically and racially diverse children is the prevalence of neighborhood segregation. Because many parents prefer to send their children to neighborhood programs, early education programs often reflect neighborhood housing patterns that result in high levels of segregation by income and race. Moreover, the number of high-minority, high-poverty neighborhoods is rising, with young children being the most likely age group to live in segregated neighborhoods.[23] An analysis of 384 metropolitan areas across the country found that many children who are three to five years old reside in neighborhoods with levels of racial and economic segregation that are very high, and higher than for older children.[24]

Summary of the Demographics

The demographic data on early childhood education clearly reveal trends that pose serious challenges to policymakers who seek to expand enrollment in high-quality programs. Hispanic children and lower-SES children are considerably less likely than their counterparts to be enrolled in some form of early childhood program. Low-income children, when they do enroll, are more likely to be in low-quality programs than children from high-income families. Moreover, the data on pre-K and Head Start enrollment suggests that most children attend preschool classrooms that are segregated by family income, and in many cases, by race/ethnicity as well. The clustering of many young children in low-quality, high-poverty, and in many cases, high-minority classrooms poses a direct and urgent challenge to policy efforts that aim to establish quality, sustainability, and equity in ECE programs. At the same time, the presence of diversity in some pre-K classrooms, by both race/ethnicity and SES, indicates that diversity is possible and extant.

What We Know from the Research

Amidst evidence that low-income children are the least likely to have access to high-quality preschools, a widely held goal in state capitols across the country is to expand access to high-quality early education programs. Reaching across political ideologies, this goal begs the question of what constitutes "quality" in a preschool program. The question persists, despite the fact that the early education field has long focused on quality, albeit on the structural components of quality, including class size, the teacher-to-child ratio, and teacher credentials.[25]

More recently, research has pointed to the salient importance of "process" quality, characterized by emotionally supportive and instructionally effective interactions between teachers and children that are consistently associated with better cognitive and social outcomes for children.[26] Yet an additional line of research points to another classroom characteristic that is significantly associated with preschool quality: the composition of children in the classroom. The evidence, as presented in the next section, suggests that children who are clustered in high-poverty and high-minority preschool classrooms develop fewer cognitive skills on average than children who may also be low income and minority, but who attend more diverse classrooms.

What Does the Research Say?

Historically, researchers who have sought to understand whether school composition affects learning have focused on older children and adolescents. James Coleman's landmark study of high-school students, Equality of Educational Opportunity (1966), concluded, "The social composition of the student body is more highly related to achievement, independent of the student's own social background, than is any school factor."[27] Fifty years later, the research methods used to estimate school effects have improved dramatically, and the results, based on far more precise analyses, are remarkably consistent.[28] For example, a re-analysis of Coleman's ninth-grade-cohort data found that a school's socioeconomic composition was one and three-quarters times more important than its *students' own* SES in predicting their academic achievement, after accounting for other differences in children's individual background.[29] This research is consistent with studies that have linked racial/ethnic composition with student achievement. Racially diverse schools are associated with higher student achievement than high-minority schools.[30] They can also reduce the prejudices and social isolation of children by race and class, as well as promote cross-cultural relationships that have long-term benefits such as greater social capital, employment opportunities, and comfort in multi-racial settings.[31]

Scholars have also explored how school and neighborhood composition may affect early learning, focusing on kindergarten and the primary years of school.[32] One study examined children's reading trajectories from kindergarten through third grade and found that although family background made the largest contribution to *initial* reading disparities, school composition and neighborhood conditions were more important in predicting SES differences in how children's reading skills progressed during school.[33] Specifically, the school's poverty concentration and number of students with lower reading ability were associated with less learning by children. Another study assessed neighborhood and school contexts and found a significant effect for socioeconomic composition in the growth of reading skills during kindergarten, and for socioeconomic composition and racial/ethnic composition during first grade.[34] Yet another study found that children who attended high-minority schools typically gained fewer math skills in both kindergarten and first grade, and fewer literacy skills in first grade, after accounting for school average SES, when compared with children in more diverse or low-minority schools.[35]

Using a small sample (n = 85) of *preschool* children, one study examined the language growth of two groups of low-income children, one attending preschools with high concentrations of low-income families, and the other attending economically mixed preschools. By the spring of preschool, children in the integrated programs learned more language skills than children in the low-income programs. For children who spoke English at home, gains in the diverse programs were enough to make their spring scores equal to those of their more affluent peers.[36] Using a larger sample of children (n = 2,966 children from eleven state pre-K programs), another study examined the relationship between preschool composition and children's learning, yielding results that are consistent with prior preschool and kindergarten findings.[37] The study analyzed the composition of children's *classrooms*, a

more precise unit of analysis than schools, and found that children in middle or high-SES classrooms learned more language and math skills than those in low-SES classrooms, regardless of children's own SES and race/ethnicity, and the racial/ethnic composition of their classrooms. Importantly, another analysis of the data found that socioeconomic classroom composition and racial/ethnic classroom composition were independently associated with children's preschool learning, suggesting that the types of classroom composition affect children's growth in different ways.[38]

Is the Research Credible?

Valid concerns have been raised—and to a large extent, answered—about the validity of research analyzing the impact of kindergarten and primary school class composition on student performance. One concern is the possibility that the findings of "school effects" merely reflect the influence of neighborhoods where children reside; that is, children who attend the same schools are likely to share the same neighborhoods, which may have a profound influence on children's achievement.[39] If true, this suggests that so-called compositional effects represent the effect of neighborhoods where children spend most of their time.

To answer this critique, researchers have distinguished between school and neighborhood effects by including measures both of children's neighborhoods and of schools in their analyses of school effects, and by comparing learning during the school year (when children go to school) and learning during the summer (when children are generally not in school). Two of the studies referenced above compared summer and school-year learning and found a significant effect for the socioeconomic and/or racial/ethnic composition of elementary schools only during the school year, suggesting that the school "effects" are indeed capturing something unique to schools because no such effect was present during the summer, when children are generally not in school.[40]

Another concern is the possibility that compositional effects at the school level merely reflect selection bias; that is, parents who enroll their children in racially or socioeconomically diverse schools differ from parents who do not, in ways that promote their children's learning. If true, this suggests that so-called compositional effects merely reflect the difference of parents who choose diverse schools. To minimize this possibility, studies have taken a quasi-experimental approach, controlling for characteristics of the family, such as maternal level of education, which are strongly associated with parenting skills, and using statistical methods to account for children's experiences before they enter preschool.[41] These measures reduce, but do not eliminate the possibility of selection bias.

The antidote to this critique is randomization. Accordingly, one study used a dataset of 850 low-income children who had been randomly assigned to elementary schools in Montgomery County, Maryland and found that low-income children who attended the district's most-advantaged schools (in which no more than 20 percent of the children were low-income) far outperformed in math and reading the low-income children who attended the district's least-advantaged elementary schools (in which 21 to 85 percent of the children were low-income). Specifically, by the end of elementary school, the initial skills gap between low-income children who attended the district's most advantaged schools and higher-income children in the district was cut by half for math and one-third for reading.[42] Another study, using a statistical method that closely approximates randomization ("propensity score matching") to address selection bias, found that African-American first-graders who attended racially segregated schools made significantly smaller gains in reading than African-American first-graders who attended racially diverse schools, controlling for the schools' percentage of children in poverty.[43]

While concerns about the unmeasured effect of neighborhoods and the possibility of selection bias are valid, careful research suggests that the compositional effects found in early education research are not simply capturing the effects of neighborhoods where children reside or the strengths of parents whose children attend diverse schools.

How Does It Work? The Role of Peers in Classrooms

The process by which preschool composition actually affects children's learning is important, though somewhat unclear and complex. Ideally, policy efforts that seek to maximize the effects of preschool composition should be informed by how this process actually occurs. For that reason, it is necessary to explore fully what may—or may not—be happening.

One possible explanation for the difference in how much children learn is that high-SES, low-minority preschools attract and retain better teachers than their lower-SES, high-minority counterparts; indeed, research in pre-K settings suggests that better teachers are more likely to teach in high-SES, low-minority classrooms.[44] If this were a sufficient explanation for preschool-composition effects, policies to develop better teachers for low-SES, high-minority preschools would be a logical way to extend the benefits associated with classroom composition into such classrooms. Yet, studies that have controlled for differences in teacher quality and teacher motivation have nevertheless found an enduring compositional effect, suggesting that something else is influencing children's learning.[45]

Another potential explanation is the effect of peers, in which higher-skilled children promote the learning of their lower-skilled peers. In addition to studies on peer effects in elementary school, several studies have examined peer effects on children's preschool learning, using data at the classroom level, and have found robust and significant associations between the cognitive skills of children's preschool peers and how much children learn.[46] Specifically, in preschool, it is beneficial for children to be surrounded by classmates who have relatively high levels of language and math skills, and this is particularly true for children who are less skilled than their classmates; children who are highly skilled tend to be less influenced by the skills of their classmates.[47]

Because SES and the skills that children bring to school are highly correlated, these studies suggest that interactions among peers are an explanation for how socioeconomically diverse classrooms may promote children's learning. On average, low-SES children enter preschool and kindergarten with fewer literacy and math skills than high-SES children, though we stress that these are *average* skill levels that, of course, vary among individual children.[48] Children with disparate skills may learn from each other in the daily interactions and play activities that typically characterize the preschool day. For example, pretend play scenarios can present opportunities to stimulate elaborate language and vocabulary use in children's role-play. Such skills naturally weave in and out of children's play. Indeed, the multiple direct interactions with peers in early childhood settings may provide more frequent and more varied language input than direct stimulation from a teacher.[49] At the same time, while children may learn directly from peers, their impact may also operate indirectly, with higher-skilled peers increasing teacher expectations and the curricular pace in the classroom.

In preschool, peers may have a particularly strong impact on language skills. One study found that language-rich preschool settings promote children's receptive language skills, especially among children who come from home environments with lower levels of language stimulation.[50] This finding is supported by evidence that early vocabulary growth is related to the amount and type of speech to which children are exposed, such as the use of open-ended questions, elicitations, expansions, and recasts, and research indicating that wide gaps in vocabulary knowledge open at young ages among

lower and higher-SES children as a result of differences in exposure.[51] Positive interactions with English-speaking peers in preschool may also foster Spanish-speaking children's English vocabulary and letter-word skills.[52]

What happens to the higher-skilled children alongside those lower-skilled children? Most of the research suggests that while lower-skilled children learn more from such interactions, higher-skilled peers are relatively immune to peer effects.[53] Interestingly, one study found that children learned more expressive language skills in pre-K classrooms that were racially/ethnically diverse (about two-thirds of the children white and one-third racial/ethnic minorities) when compared to more homogenous classrooms, regardless of the race/ethnicity or family income of the individual child in the class.[54]

Peer diversity may also offer important social benefits to all children, irrespective of their SES. Children from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and race/ethnicities can learn from peers who are different, and these benefits may be enduring and profound. Usually by kindergarten, children have developed an awareness of racial/ethnic identities and social status, and the ability to make social comparisons.[55] Exposure to peers from a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds can inform these perceptions. We know that in racially diverse kindergartens, for example, children's acceptance of peers and friendships may transcend racial or ethnic identities.[56] Friendships in diverse classrooms could thus diminish the social isolation that characterizes children in socioeconomically and racially homogenous neighborhoods, whatever their predominant race or income.

Summary of the Research

Extensive research in kindergarten and elementary school settings has established that the socioeconomic and racial/ethnic composition of schools affects children's learning and achievement. Two studies have found that the effects of school composition extend into preschool, and that they cannot be explained by the presence of better teachers in high-SES, low-minority classrooms. These findings are complemented by another line of inquiry into the effects of peers; in addition to research on peer effects in elementary school, several careful studies have found that young children learn with and from their peers in the highly social context of preschool, and that lower-skilled children appear to benefit cognitively from sharing classrooms with higher-skilled peers. Moreover, all children may benefit socially, rendering the call for quality outcomes for all children inextricably linked with the diversity of children within preschool classrooms.

What We Know from Statements of National Early Childhood Organizations

Given the research results and their potential consequences for young children's learning and early education, it seems important to understand if, and the degree to which, the findings related to classroom composition are penetrating policy and practice. Although not the sole barometers of policy, the position statements of major national organizations committed to advancing early learning both reflect current thinking and affect policy and practice; as such, they are worthy of attention.

In order to discern if and how fourteen such organizations have addressed this issue of classroom composition (though there are others that were beyond the scope of this analysis), we conducted a content analysis of each organization's major policy/position statements and in many cases had phone conversations with individual staff members. The organizations are:

- American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- Children's Defense Fund (CDF)
- Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
- Education Commission of the States (ECS)
- Education Trust (ET)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
- National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
- National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)
- National Education Association (NEA)
- National Governors Association (NGA)
- National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL)
- National Head Start Association (NHSA), and
- Zero to Three (ZTT).

To collect the policy and position statements, we first searched organization websites for statements of purpose or mission statements regarding the children the organization intends to address. Next, we examined position statements and advocacy documents, looking specifically for indications that the organization seeks to serve a diverse cohort of children. Finally, we contacted the organizations via e-mail and telephone to confirm that we reviewed all relevant material related to the organization's support for economic and racial integration in early education.[57]

In general, we were unable to find any position statements that specifically called for economic and racial integration within *preschool classrooms*, with the possible exception of the AFT, which affirms a commitment to integrated schools—though not specific to preschools—and to a robust research agenda that informs society about "the scope and impact of segregation, desegregation, and re-segregation across the nation."[58]

This is not to suggest, however, that the other position statements do not reflect concern with honoring cultural and linguistic diversity among children, families, and early childhood workers. In fact, every single position statement reviewed indicates a clear and visible commitment to advancing the well-being of *all* children and, in most cases, to honoring cultural diversity. Although some organizations focus on children within specific age-ranges (NAEYC, NBCDI, NHSA, and ZTT) and some focus on specific populations (CDF, NBCDI, and NHSA), most if not all of them expressed the need to embrace cultural pluralism. In addition to expressing a broad commitment to embracing diversity, many organizations additionally suggest specific approaches to achieve this end. For example, a number of organizations address the importance of closing the achievement gap, while others advance the provision of high-quality services, with a commitment to bilingualism and cultural pluralism as key elements of quality. Additionally, many of the organizations speak to cultural diversity in terms of interactions among staff, faculty, and parents. Each of these themes is explored below, with a few examples provided.

Closing the Opportunity and Achievement Gap

Recognizing that much of the achievement gap reflects the varying opportunity to access quality services, and that such access is less available for low-income and minority students than others, many organizations call for more equitable opportunities. In fostering the ideals of the American democracy, NASBE calls for developing "a culturally competent education system that helps all students and staff interact constructively with individuals from diverse backgrounds."[59] The NEA lists

Equal Opportunity as its first value that guides its mission.[60] As its central tenant, the Education Trust directly states the importance of closing the achievement gap.[61] ECS seeks to advance equitable and effective education for all students.[62]

Achieving High-Quality Services

Most of the policy statements by national organizations also place a priority on the provision of high-quality early childhood services, with "high quality" defined somewhat differently in the various position statements. Many conceptualize quality, at least in part, with a commitment to developing learning environments that respect children's home language and culture. NAEYC policies advocate "promoting second language acquisition and the preservation of children's home languages and identities."[63] A 2008 publication by ZTT notes that because "early childhood services are often the first point of contact with mainstream culture for immigrant families and 'minority' families in the United States, it is essential that the services be based on a deeper understanding of the background and lived experiences of the families in our ever-changing culture." [64] Others, such as CDF, commit to advancing pedagogical diversity in terms of the content addressed by offering training that reflects the diverse cultures of the children.[65] And still others acknowledge children's diverse learning styles; CCSSO notes that this is particularly important when constructing assessments for young children.[66]

Advancing a Culturally Diverse Workforce

Adults who engage with children can affect what and how young children learn in profound ways. Therefore, fostering a workforce that is itself culturally diverse and is well prepared to foster cultural diversity emerged with frequency in the position statements. ZTT has released a document that addresses the importance of "training early childhood practitioners to better understand the distinction between individualistic and interdependent cultures" so that children's diverse learning styles can be fostered.[67] NAEYC's position statements support the development of teaching practices that acknowledge and respect multiple cultures and languages in the classroom.[68] NBCDI not only focuses on advancing diversity for staff, but is also concerned with supporting culturally relevant practices for diverse families.[69] NAESP's position statement values diversity and the recruitment of ethnically diverse persons for administrative positions in order to establish role models for all students.[70] CCSSO tasks school leaders with developing equitably and culturally responsive schools so that a community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources are used. [71] In short, advancing professional capacity for meeting students' diverse needs is an acknowledged component of many organizational position statements.

Summary of the Statements of National Early Childhood Organizations

Overall, the statements of the national early childhood organizations do not specifically call for economic and racial integration within preschool classrooms. Many of them advance one or more themes of how to honor diversity within early childhood settings by closing achievement gaps, supporting high-quality services, and/or nurturing a culturally diverse workforce.

What Is Happening Now: Examples of Preschool Diversity

While the scholarship on diversity in early education has accumulated, some program providers have been recruiting a diverse array of families whose children bring multiple socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds to their classrooms. We present two examples below, which demonstrate that socioeconomic and racial/ethnic diversity in preschool can be done, and is being done. There is much to be learned regarding funding, recruitment, parent engagement, and transportation, from these integrated programs.

Morris Jeff Community School, New Orleans, Louisiana

The Morris Jeff Community School in New Orleans, Louisiana, was started by a socioeconomically and racially diverse coalition of parents because they sought a school as diverse as their neighborhoods. To create an integrated pre-K program, Morris Jeff's founders took advantage of a seldom-used option in Louisiana's LA4 Early Childhood Program, which supports pre-K enrollment for low-income four-year-olds, to enroll tuition-paying students alongside children who receive state funding.[72] This enrollment model has created a socioeconomically and racially diverse pre-K program in the school and its classrooms, which creates a foundation for diversity in subsequent grades.

Morris Jeff's pre-K program has long waiting lists for both the LA4 and tuition-paying seats. "There are people who clearly could send their children to any private school in the city and have chosen to come to Morris Jeff because they believe so strongly in public school and their child having the same opportunities as the child next door," said Morris Jeff principal Patricia Perkins. "And then there are many parents who . . . depend on the public school, and they're so absolutely thrilled that their children are going to school with other kids who don't look like them—but really are like them at their core."[73]

Morris Jeff assesses its children's mathematics and language skills to gauge their developmental progress and readiness for kindergarten. In 2013–14, using the Developing Skills Checklist, a standardized assessment used by Louisiana pre-K programs, only about one quarter of Morris Jeff's pre-K children began the year demonstrating "mastery" (a minimum score chosen by program administrators) in math, and only one tenth demonstrated mastery in language skills; by the end of the year, more than 80 percent of students demonstrated mastery in each subject.[74] While these results may be attributable to many elements of children's lives, they suggest that the Morris Jeff model is producing positive results.

The biggest challenge for Morris Jeff's pre-K program is funding. While combined state and local funding for Louisiana students in kindergarten through twelfth grade averages about $8,500 per pupil, the state only reimburses $4,700 per LA4 student, and tuition-paying families pay at the same rate, per state law.[75] Morris Jeff's pre-K program operates at a loss, but the school has remained committed to offering pre-K, building the cost into the overall school budget and holding private fundraising drives to support the program.

At a Glance:
Morris Jeff Community School

Location
New Orleans, Louisiana

Program mission and history
Public charter school opened in 2010; Diversity is a core value in the charter

Funding
Funded by Louisiana's LA4 program (state appropriations and federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds), private tuition, and fundraising

Transportation
Provided at no cost to students

Educational approach
- Pre-K is guided by the state early childhood standards for the LA4 program and the International Baccalaureate curriculum (used in grades pre-K thru fifth grade)
- Full-day pre-K program
- Two teachers in each classroom (one certified)

Enrollment
- Three pre-K classes, each with twenty four-year-old children
- Program composition is 48 percent white, 45 percent black, 5 percent two or more races, 2 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent students with IEPs
- Cohort consists of forty children (67 percent) eligible for state LA4 program (based on low-income status), and twenty children (33 percent) who pay tuition.
- Separate admissions lotteries for LA4 and tuition-paying seats; children selected randomly with preference for those living in catchment zone and siblings

Hartford Region Magnet Schools, Greater Hartford, Connecticut

In 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled in *Sheff v. O'Neill* that the racial isolation of Hartford students was unconstitutional, and a 2003 settlement created a regional system of voluntary school choice that includes inter-district magnet schools. Today, all but one of the elementary magnet schools offer pre-K programs.[76] The state Department of Education strives to achieve racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity within the Hartford Region Magnet School system by balancing enrollment of Hartford and suburban students in an admissions lottery.[77]

One challenge in pursuing diversity across a region is the cost of transportation. The state provides transportation for Hartford families to out-of-district magnet pre-K programs, but not to magnet pre-K programs within Hartford. Suburban families must provide their own transportation

At a Glance:
Hartford Region Magnet Schools

Location
Greater Hartford, Connecticut

Program mission and history
- Regional magnet school system created as part of the remedy in the 1996 *Sheff v. O'Neill* case; significant magnet school growth began in 2003
- Schools have dual purpose of encouraging integration and providing high-quality education

Funding
- Free for all students[65]
- Funded by a combination of state subsidies and payments from students' sending school districts

Transportation
Services or subsidies provided to some pre-K families, depending on their home district and school location

Educational approach
- Pre-K programs use the CT Early Learning and Development Standards
- Most are full-day programs
- Each classroom has twenty children, and two to three teachers, at least one of whom is certified

Enrollment
- Population consists of 2,071 pre-K students, in twenty-two magnet schools
- The pre-K magnet system draws 36 percent of its students from Hartford, and 64 percent from suburban districts (in K-12 magnet classes, the overall ratio is closer to 50/50 city and suburban)
- Pre-K enrollment at CREC Reggio Magnet School of the Arts is 43 percent white, 27 percent black, 18 percent Hispanic, 7 percent two or more races, 4.2 percent Asian, and 0.8 percent Native American
- Pre-K enrollment at CREC Reggio Magnet School of the Arts is 36.6 percent low income (free or reduced-price lunch)

to all magnet pre-K programs, but are eligible for a daily transportation subsidy.[78] Even when transportation is provided, building a strong community can be difficult at schools where families live far apart. Some schools provide parents with transportation to school events and teacher conferences and encourage teachers to communicate with families via e-mails and daily notes home.[79]

Another demand of having diverse classrooms is the need to be sensitive to cultural differences. One pre-K teacher found it particularly important in diverse classrooms to have one-on-one conversations with parents early in the year in order to understand each family's background and needs: "We have to really make sure that we have the time to sit and talk to the parents and know what their beliefs are and what they want us to know about their child."[80]

Together, the magnet schools received almost four times as many pre-K applications in 2014–15 as their pre-K seats.[81] While a system-wide assessment of pre-K results is not available, individual programs report positive outcomes. For example, in 2014, at the CREC Reggio Magnet School of the Arts, 91 percent of pre-K students scored "proficient" on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test.[82] While we do not know how much these results reflect skill development attributable to the pre-K program, they are encouraging. In addition, diverse programs create social connections that families might not otherwise find. One principal reflected that some of his school's biggest successes "come on Monday morning, when . . . we hear that kids from Glastonbury attended a birthday party for a Hartford student. That would not have happened unless we existed."[83]

Summary of the Examples

Both examples underscore the strengths of diverse settings, while acknowledging their challenges. Certainly, finding, securing, and maintaining adequate funding from multiple financing streams so that families from diverse socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds can access quality programs requires creativity and commitment. While the Hartford magnet schools are state and locally funded by judicial mandate, Morris Jeff weaves together funding from three sources: federal, state, and private, with "private" including revenue from both tuition payments and fundraising. Even then, Morris Jeff's pre-K program funding is inadequate; with only $4,700 per child annually, the school operates its pre-K classrooms at a loss. Both the Hartford magnet schools and Morris Jeff provide or subsidize transportation for some or all of the families who must travel long distances to their pre-K center. Administrators and teachers also work to engage a diverse array of families in their children's preschool experience. At one of the Hartford magnet pre-K programs, for example, teachers communicate daily with parents about their children, and sit down with parents early in the year to learn about their background and hopes for their children.

The fruits of these efforts are apparent to the teachers and administrators who have committed themselves to nurturing a diverse community. Children and families in these schools' communities are forging friendships that transcend the social divisions common beyond the preschool walls. The empirical evidence that children benefit from this diversity in terms of their cognitive and social skills is also suggestive, but not definitive. Ideally, such data would be examined with more rigorous statistical methods that can account for the possibility of unmeasured variables or selection bias. In their absence, the data reported here are encouraging.

These examples represent two instances of preschool diversity that are happening now, and the data (referenced in "How Diverse Are Programs and Classrooms?") suggest that other pre-K programs, while far from the norm, are doing so as well.[84] Again, preschool classroom diversity is possible and extant.

Recommendations for Building an Excellent, Sustainable, and Equitable Preschool System

The argument for diversity in early education is more than an academic or policy debate; it invokes a moral commitment to young children. The research on classroom composition and peer effects in early childhood education suggests that segregating children limits their learning. Yet, much of current preschool policy effectively segregates children by income, and often, by race/ethnicity. We need to devote concerted attention to classroom composition in the important discourse about what constitutes preschool quality.

Research on the distinct benefits of preschool classrooms with socioeconomic and racial/ethnic diversity, along with research on elementary school composition and research on preschool peer effects, provides a strong foundation for the development of policies and practices that encourage and support diversity in preschool classrooms, even though such integration may not be feasible in all contexts.[85] We also recommend the expansion of research on diversity in order to further develop our understanding of the nature and extent of benefits from classroom diversity in early education.

We recognize that preschool enrollment is, and will undoubtedly remain, a voluntary choice for parents. In this context, policymakers should try to broaden parents' access to high-quality early education programs by encouraging the formation of diverse pre-K and Head Start classrooms. At the same time, we fully recognize the pride that many low-income parents feel regarding the Head Start programs that their children attend; indeed, parents' "ownership" of Head Start programs was a guiding principle in their design, and we deeply respect parents' engagement in this regard. But we also argue that low-income parents, like higher-income parents, should have multiple high-quality preschool options from which to choose, including ones that offer socioeconomic and racial/ethnic diversity. A more socioeconomically diverse Head Start would also be consistent with the vision of one of its founders, Ed Zigler, who had originally hoped for broader based enrollment in the program.[86]

Though we recognize that broader structural reforms may be needed, we offer below more immediate recommendations for how to foster diverse preschool classrooms, and thereby support the goal of creating excellent, sustainable, and equitable early education programs.

Build Public and Professional Knowledge

The early learning arena has been an exemplar of using data to drive policy, accounting for much of the policy attention currently being accorded young children. Much of the data presented in this report, while clear, has remained remote from those who create policy or those who plan and administer early childhood services. In addition to calling for an enriched research base, we recommend initiatives that will disseminate and communicate available information, using diverse sources to reach diverse audiences and to incentivize new research on classroom diversity.

• Foundations and the government should support efforts to extend and deepen our knowledge of preschool classroom composition, how it operates in practice, and how it affects subgroups of children, such as those who are learning English as a second language, those of diverse family incomes, those of diverse races/ethnicities, migrant children, and children with disabilities.

• Foundations and the government should support convening a high-level panel or National Academy of Science Workgroup to report to the American public on the information currently available regarding classroom integration at the preschool level and to make recommendations regarding research studies.

• The government, foundations, researchers, professional organizations, and early childhood advocates should disseminate empirical data on classroom composition in early education to the public through the use of print, broadcast, and social media and publicize exemplars of classrooms and programs that make integration a priority; widely share the lessons and challenges from these efforts.

• Researchers should communicate the data and findings from empirical research to policymakers and early learning leaders through professional papers, conferences and conference presentations, and working forums.

• National early childhood organizations should examine their current policy statements to ensure that they reflect current research and offer guidance to readers and members regarding the effects of classroom integration at the preschool level. Even while these organizations call for programs of the highest quality and clearly seek to advance cultural diversity among the children they address, nearly all of them are silent on the question of whether children should be segregated in classrooms by income, and effectively by race/ethnicity, as they are now. We call on them to take a stance on this question, which is a critical element of their commitment to serve *all* children and serve them equitably.

Increase Funding

The examples here provide illustrations of how some preschool leaders have blended funding from both public and private sources to create classrooms of children who are diverse by income and race/ethnicity. These public and private funding streams, however, are often inadequate. To support program-level efforts to serve diverse communities, state and/or federal policymakers should:

• Create an "equity" set-aside in current federal early education funding, parallel to the concept of the "quality" set-asides in Head Start and Child Care Development Block Grant funding, to support classroom integration with the funds used at program discretion for transportation, outreach, parent engagement, professional development, dual language programs, and culturally appropriate curricula.

• Create incentives for programs to reserve slots for both publicly funded and privately funded children.

• Increase fiscal allocations for Head Start considerably to allow Head Start providers to use the existing option of enrolling up to 10 percent of their children from families with incomes above the poverty line without jeopardizing services to low-income children.

- Create a pool of funding to support ongoing empirical research on this topic, which we describe above in "Build Public and Professional Knowledge."

Consider Location and Subsidize Transportation

When parents choose a preschool for their children, location matters. Therefore, in addition to funding programs in predominantly low-income neighborhoods, policymakers should consider supporting programs in or close to socioeconomically and racially diverse neighborhoods. At the same time, the predominance of residential segregation requires that policymakers assure that families have access to affordable transportation to diverse programs. State and federal policymakers should:

- Strive to locate new programs on the boundaries of neighborhoods that might attract families with various SES and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

- Consider locating programs in or near large employers, such as hospitals, universities, and corporate offices, where employees with children may represent a diverse array of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

- Create incentives for large corporations to initiate and/or support ECE efforts where classroom integration is given a priority.

- Provide financial support for transportation to parents who choose a program that is not within walking distance, either with vouchers, subsidies, or direct provision.

Strengthen Professional Development

At the core of any major advancement, policy must lead to the improvement of practice. In early learning, the role of teachers and program leaders is instrumental to all programmatic implementation. We recommend initiatives that will enhance attention to classroom diversity in all ECE teacher preparation efforts, pre-service or in-service.

- States should support professional development that systematically shares the research on socioeconomic and racial/ethnic diversity to prepare teachers for programming in integrated settings.

- Higher education and postgraduate education schools should implement curricular reforms that address these challenges when preparing teachers for the classroom. One option would be to promote enrollment for all prospective teachers in a course on diversity in ECE. Such a course should address all aspects of diversity, including the issues related to classroom composition examined in this report.

- Higher education and postgraduate education schools should assure that student teaching placements are done in settings where classroom diversity exists.

- States should amend certification requirements for new and continuing education professionals to incorporate attention to diversity broadly and to classroom integration specifically.

- Foundations and the government should jointly develop opportunities for teachers and administrators from around the county to come together to share their successes

and experiences with classroom diversity. Such exchanges could be part of an innovation effort, but it should be sustained for a minimum of five years.

Support Enrollment and Engagement

Even when extending open arms, programs cannot assume that families from all backgrounds will step through the preschool door. Gaps in preschool participation are rooted, in part, in cultural and language differences that deter some families from enrolling in center-based preschool. These differences obligate programs to assure that families know their parenting beliefs and wishes will be respected in the preschool setting. When families do enroll, program administrators and teachers need to engage them in their children's preschool experience and to include them as valued members of the preschool community. We call on policymakers and program administrators to support parent outreach and recruitment efforts, and the engagement of parents in their children's preschool experience.

- Policymakers should support public information and outreach efforts that inform and recruit families from diverse backgrounds.

- Preschool programs should regularly allot time to provide opportunities for teachers and parents to communicate about the curriculum and their individual children. This could be done via face-to-face meetings, phone, or other electronic communication.

Conclusion

This report calls attention to the value of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic diversity within preschool classrooms. It has taken the stance that not only is such integration possible (as evidenced by data on pre-K programs and the two examples), but also that it is an important (though often neglected) correlate of quality.

In the short term, such diversity supports the development of important cognitive skills in young children; in the long run, it can foster far greater social understanding and social equity. Taking a stand on quality for *all* children commits our society to the kinds of classroom-level integration that are long overdue, especially for our youngest learners. Without such diversity, public investments in early childhood education are on fragile ground in the quest for excellence, sustainability, and equity.

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