

EXPANDING ACCESS to Early Childhood Programs



The Education Trust

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

- **Early childhood programs have long-term benefits for children, yet fail to reach those who can most benefit.**¹ Numerous studies have found that children who participate from birth to age 5 in high-quality early childhood programs that focus on physical, social-emotional, and cognitive health and development have better long-term outcomes than children who do not have these experiences.² Yet, the data also show that Latino children are less likely to access ECE programs at all; that Black children and those from low-income families are less likely to access high-quality early childhood education programs; and that the child care arrangements they do have are often of lower quality than their peers.³
- **Children need to be supported through planned transitions as they move from infancy to early childhood programs and into kindergarten.**⁴ Thoughtful processes that engage parents, teachers, and young students in the process of moving between programs can improve children's health outcomes and success in school. This is particularly important for our youngest learners, as research shows that Black infants die at higher rates than their White peers, and that child care is most expensive and hardest to find for children ages 0 to 3.⁵
- **There is no one-size-fits-all approach to investments in early childhood programs.** Different families have different needs and desires for programs at various stages of their children's lives. Similarly, different communities may have different early childhood programming needs and desires, especially families of color, bilingual families, and low-income families. State leaders in education and other agencies need support to invest in a variety of programs and design policies that enhance access to high-quality early childhood programs.
- **School and district leaders should be part of a community process to increase access to high-quality early childhood programs.** No single entity in the community can meet the needs of all families. Working together, schools, community organizations, and families can assess the strengths and needs of the community and leverage funds and policy changes to ensure that all families have access to the programs that best support them. Ensuring that such an assessment includes the range of early childhood programs (including home visiting programs, programs for children from non-English speaking households, developmental assessments and interventions for young children, playgroups for relatives caring for children, or other supports for working families) is critical.

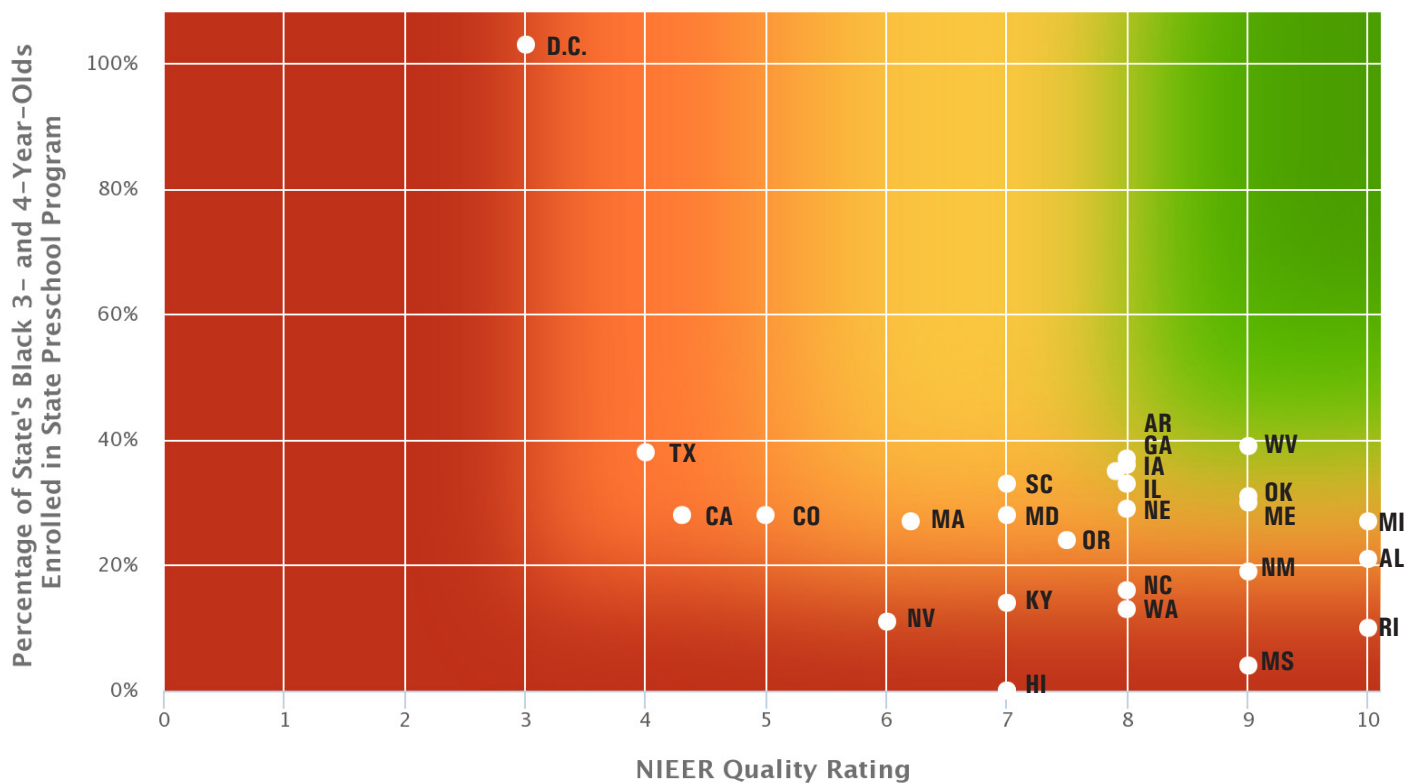


HOW WELL DO STATE-FUNDED PRE-K PROGRAMS SERVE BLACK AND LATINO CHILDREN?

A NEW REPORT BY THE EDUCATION TRUST EXAMINES THE ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF STATE-FUNDED PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLD BLACK AND LATINO CHILDREN.⁶ THE REPORT FINDS THAT:

- Only **1% of Latino children and 4% of Black children** in the 26 states analyzed were enrolled in high-quality state-funded preschool programs.
- In **11 of the 26 states**, Latino children are underrepresented in state-funded preschool programs. In three of those states, so are Black children.
- Access is lower for Black and Latino **3-year-olds** than for Black and Latino 4-year-olds.
- Far too few state-funded preschool programs collect and report **race and ethnicity data**.

Percentage of State Population of **Black 3- and 4-Year-Olds** by Number of NIEER Quality Benchmarks Met



Source: Carrie Gillespie, *Young Learners, Missed Opportunities: Ensuring That Black and Latino Children Have Access to High-Quality State-Funded Preschool*, (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 2019), www.edtrust.org/preschool

WHAT DO WE RECOMMEND?

TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR BLACK AND LATINO CHILDREN, ED TRUST RECOMMENDS THAT STATE LEADERS:

- 1. Publish meaningful equity data and use it to track progress.** States should collect and publish racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic demographics of enrollees in their state-funded preschool programs.
- 2. Prioritize expansion in historically underserved communities.** While states should ensure access to high-quality ECE for all young children, they should prioritize expanded access in neighborhoods with the highest number or percentage of underserved children.

- 3. Spread the word to Black and Latino families.** States should conduct substantial outreach to increase awareness of ECE programs and enrollment procedures by providing outreach materials in the most common non-English languages spoken in the state, making clear that enrollment does not require information about citizenship or immigration status, and actively partnering with families of current or former Black and Latino preschool students to spread the word through social networks, among other strategies.



4. Make enrollment easy. States must remove barriers to enrollment, by offering enrollment materials in multiple languages; providing phone, mail, and in-person enrollment opportunities in addition to online; minimizing required information; and allowing a variety of identification options for necessary documentation.

5. Offer hours and locations that align with schedules and commutes for working families. States should analyze the most common work schedules for low-income families, locate programs at or near the state's largest work sites for Black and Latino families, and prioritize public transit accessibility of ECE programs.

3. Support dual language learners by offering dual language immersion preschool programs in the state's most common non-English spoken language, prioritizing access for dual language learners, and providing all ECE staff with professional development to meaningfully support families with a home language other than English.

4. Support families by connecting them with support services, such as mental health services, emergency crisis services, early intervention, home visiting, developmental assessment, health care and dental services, and facilitating seamless transitions into kindergarten.

5. Diversify the workforce by funding higher education ECE degree programs that recruit and support students of color and multilingual students; help with loan repayment or loan forgiveness for high-quality degree programs; ensure that degree programs are accessible across the state and available online; ensure that coursework is available in multiple languages; develop high-quality ECE apprenticeships and career and technical education programs in high schools; and support professional compensation and benefits at least on par with those of K-12 educators.⁸

TO IMPROVE QUALITY FOR ALL CHILDREN, AND ESPECIALLY FOR BLACK AND LATINO CHILDREN, EDTRUST RECOMMENDS THAT STATE LEADERS:

1. Meet quality benchmarks, including making professional development meaningful for Black and Latino children and their families.

Providers must provide high-quality, culturally and linguistically competent, developmentally appropriate preschool programs.

2. Eliminate suspensions and expulsions.

Both of these practices disproportionately affect young children of color and should be replaced with evidence-based practices and the professional development necessary to implement them with fidelity.⁷

Endnotes

1. *America, It's Time to Talk About Child Care* (Case for Childcare): <https://caseforchildcare.org/2020CaseForChildCare.pdf>. 2. *Graduates of early childhood program show greater educational gains as adults* (National Institutes of Health): <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/graduates-early-childhood-program-show-greater-educational-gains-adults%20>. 3. *Young Learners, Missed Opportunities: Ensuring that Black and Latino Children Have Access to High-Quality State-Funded Preschool* (The Education Trust): www.edtrust.org/preschool; *Equity and Excellence: African-American Children's Access to Quality Preschool* (Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes): <http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CEELO-NIEERequityExcellence-2013.pdf>; *Examining Quality Across the Preschool-to-Third-Grade Continuum* (Center for American Progress): https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/07110047/Pre-3_AccessToQuality.pdf; *Access to High Quality Early Care and Education: Readiness and Opportunity Gaps in America* (Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes): http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ceelo_policy_report_access-quality_ece.pdf. 4. *Investing in Infant and Toddler Child Care to Strengthen Working Families* (Center for American Progress): <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2019/10/21/475867/investing-infant-toddler-child-care-strengthen-working-families/>. 5. *Why America's Black Mothers and Babies are in a Life-or-Death Crisis* (The New York Times): <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/magazine/black-mothers-babies-death-maternal-mortality.html>. 6. Learn more at www.edtrust.org/preschool. 7. *New Data Reveal 250 Preschoolers are Suspended or Expelled Every Day* (Center for American Progress): <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2017/11/06/442280/new-data-reveal-250-preschoolers-suspended-expelled-every-day/>. 8. *Increasing Qualifications, Centering on Equity: Experiences and Advice from Early Childhood Educators of Color* (National Association for the Education of Young Children): https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/increasing_qualifications_centering_equity.pdf; *Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment* (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment): <https://cscc.berkeley.edu/files/2019/12/RacialWageGaps-Early-Education-Brief-v3.pdf>