



Strategies Toward the Equitable Implementation of PreK in Family Child Care

PreK Funding Procurement, Child Enrollment, and Data Tracking | Issue 4 | February 2024

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Highlights

State and local PreK systems recognize the importance and benefit of including FCC, but there is a need for more planful, systematic approaches to support FCC participation.

- Some state and local PreK systems recognize that FCC presents a ripe opportunity for expanding access to PreK. These systems work with intermediaries to recruit FCC educators and help them complete applications and meet eligibility requirements.
- Challenges, including aligning eligibility criteria with Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, reapplication procedures, and child enrollment rules, may hinder FCC educators' participation and reproduce inequities in public PreK systems.

State and local PreK systems recognize the importance of collecting and coordinating data across other early care and education systems, and either have existing data-tracking strategies in place or plan to implement early childhood integrated data systems.

- Some state and local PreK systems offer critical supports to ensure FCC educators can meet the data collection requirements of the PreK system.

For a glossary of PKFCC terms (e.g., equity-centered ECE system, intermediary, network), please visit our website.

www.erikson.edu/research/prek-in-family-child-care-project-pkfcc

ISSUE SERIES OVERVIEW

The PreK in Family Child Care (PKFCC) Project issue series explores strategies, successes, and challenges in the implementation of publicly funded PreK delivery in family child care (FCC) settings in the U.S. Intentionally (re)designing PreK systems to be more inclusive, equitable, and just can pave the way for transformative change across early care and education (ECE) systems that can result in enhanced outcomes for young children and families.

Guiding principles¹ for mixed-delivery PreK systems that authentically include FCC programs:

1. Recognize that high-quality PreK occurs in FCC, whether it receives public funding or not
2. Value and learn from FCC strengths and assets
3. Intentionally design resources, standards, and compensation structures for the FCC context
4. Preserve continuity of care, infant and toddler care, and the broader birth-to-5 system
5. Make equity and justice top priorities for FCC educators, many of whom face inequities due to racism and sexism

This series is focused on identifying how publicly funded PreK programs are including FCC in their mixed-delivery models by focusing on the following areas:

- Qualifications and Compensation
- Curriculum, Assessment, Developmental Screening, and Monitoring
- Infrastructure and Support
- Recruitment, Eligibility, and Data Collection

A partnership of

Introduction

This brief report presents key findings about *how state and local PreK systems recruit and support family child care (FCC) programs, determine eligibility requirements for FCC procurement of PreK funding as well as child enrollment requirements, and track data* to ensure FCC settings are equitably included in PreK delivery.

Findings are based on data collected through focus groups in June 2023 with four state and local PreK administrators and two administrators from intermediary organizations that support FCC educators in PreK. We also include data from an earlier focus group where participants from another locality discussed recruitment strategies. Together, participants represented four states, one city, and one local school district,² including those considering or recently beginning implementation of FCC in their mixed-delivery PreK systems.

This brief also includes insights and recommendations from our PreK in FCC Educator Advisory Board. A key foundation for this series is that state and local PreK systems recognize the importance and benefit of including FCC to ensure equitable access, experiences, and outcomes for children. Promising approaches are highlighted at the end of the brief.

Key Findings

FCC Educator Recruitment

Some state and local PreK systems recognize that FCC presents a ripe opportunity for expanding access to PreK, and they work with intermediaries to recruit FCC educators. Recruitment strategies are not specifically tailored for FCC, however. Rather, participating locales target all educators broadly through a variety of methods. Current recruitment strategies include announcements in educator-focused newsletters, state association listservs, meet-and-greet sessions, informational webinars, and word of mouth. In an earlier focus group, administrators from San Antonio shared their pipeline strategy to create dedicated on-ramps for FCC educators, preparing them to offer PreK in the future (see box 1).

Box 1

Building a pipeline of FCC educators ready to offer PreK

San Antonio's publicly funded PreK program, PreK 4 SA, partners with a local nonprofit organization that provides coaching and support to home-based child care educators in their preferred language and connects them to resources and grants aimed at improving program quality and meeting licensing and registration qualifications to provide public PreK. Working with home-based child care educators who are recently or not yet licensed and offering differentiated supports depending on needs is intended to build a pipeline of FCC educators who will be ready to deliver PreK in the future.

Negative perceptions that FCC is not a high-quality PreK setting may constrain recruitment efforts and pose challenges for FCC educators seeking to participate in PreK systems. If traditional partners of PreK, such as public school districts, do not view FCC programs as high-quality, these perspectives can hinder the formation of potential partnerships that could facilitate the implementation of PreK in FCC. Intermediary administrators in Maryland, for example, indicate they are working hard to change these perceptions. In addition, FCCs may be less open to recruitment into a system if they don't perceive a sense of value and respect. When early care systems actively communicate their genuine appreciation for the diverse expertise within FCC, it can increase their responsiveness to outreach efforts and enhance the overall effectiveness and success of recruitment initiatives.

Application Process for PreK Slots

State and local PreK systems provide support for FCC educators with application and procurement procedures that may be challenging for individuals to complete on their own. Some state and local PreK systems have extensive application procedures with paperwork and administrative requirements that are not tailored for FCC and which may be unrealistic for FCC educators (see box 2). Some PreK systems report hosting informational webinars and having regional

Box 2



FCC Educator Perspective

Streamlining the Application Process

FCC educators³ report that PreK system applications are long and onerous, requiring responses to questions that may be irrelevant for FCC settings (e.g., multiple staff people).

“Our application was like 100 and something pages. We used to have to get together in groups to actually go through the application. And the fact that a lot of stuff did not pertain to family child care. So, like, 60 of those pages might have been about just staff that you had to go through and put something in each one of those pages, even though it was not applicable. ...It could take several days, because of the fact that the application is so long, it’s not a thing that you can just sit down and do it after work. ...And it’s not a long window for when they put the application out and when you have to turn it in. ...What has recently made it better is just the fact that they don’t ask for the same redundant stuff year after year, shortening that process.”

—FCC educator, Philadelphia, PA

coordinators available to provide support and technical assistance to FCC educators around navigating the PreK application process. In Maryland, the application for child care educators to participate in the PreK system can be challenging, particularly for FCCs and individuals with little to no grant writing experience. Since 2020, a growing subset of FCC providers across the state have had access to an intermediary organization that handles the grant application and grant management on their behalf.

Some PreK systems have rules about how FCC educators apply to deliver PreK that are particularly challenging for individual FCC programs. In Maine, for example, FCC business owners must contract

directly with a school district to submit their application to provide public PreK. In Washington, FCC educators are direct contractors with the state PreK system, which requires a contractor to offer a minimum of 75 slots and to complete a Comprehensive Early Learning Services Request for Application. The state’s PreK system encourages FCC educators to apply as a collective with other FCC business owners to be a public PreK contractor to meet the minimum enrollment qualification.

“What has worked for us is allowing or, you know, having or promoting providers, family child care providers to create a group. So they apply together to be a contractor and then support each other and share resources, so then it does become worthwhile for them.”

—Washington state administrator

In California’s Pajaro Valley Unified School District, the Family Child Care Home Education Network (FCCHEN) responsible for administering the California State Preschool Program in FCC settings addresses some of these challenges by not requiring a separate application to receive PreK dollars. Instead, funding from different sources is assigned to individual children based on their eligibility. While there may be a high barrier to entry for FCC educators to join the FCCHEN and educators may not even be aware if or when they are receiving PreK funding, when implemented equitably, this seamless process for receiving public dollars may be a promising approach to FCC educator participation.

Additional challenges, such as availability of applications in languages other than English and reapplication procedures, may make it difficult for some FCC educators to join and remain involved in public PreK. All four of the state-level PreK systems in our focus groups (Maine, Maryland, Vermont, Washington) indicate that their applications to participate in the PreK system are only available in English. As mentioned in earlier briefs in this series, language accessibility is a crosscutting equity issue that extends beyond application documents to professional development offerings,⁴ curriculum, assessment, and screening tools.⁵

Reapplication procedures may also be burdensome for FCC educators. Requirements for reapplication to PreK differed across focus group participants. Maryland and Vermont require sites to reapply every year and every 3 years, respectively, whereas Maine and Washington only require sites to reapply if substantial changes were made to their program (e.g., hours or number of slots).

Program Eligibility for PreK Funding

Some state and local PreK systems align eligibility for program participation in PreK with the state quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).

Three of the PreK systems in our focus group report that FCCs are subject to the same QRIS-based eligibility rules for receiving PreK funding as centers. In Maryland and Vermont, all programs are required to have a minimum rating of three out of five stars in their state's QRIS rating system, with Maryland giving priority to programs with the highest ratings. Vermont also requires all programs to have at least two points in each of the five components of its QRIS. In addition, both states require programs with three or four stars to submit a plan approved by their state's Department of Education to achieve four stars within two years (Vermont) and five stars within five years (Maryland). Similarly, in Washington, programs are required to attain a QRIS level four or five rating within 24 months. While QRIS rating levels requirements across these locales are consistent for centers and FCCs that want to participate in PreK, QRIS standards themselves may be tailored specifically for FCC settings (e.g., Maryland) or differentiated to make allowances or exceptions for certain requirements (e.g., Washington). While these modifications for FCC may increase access to PreK participation for some educators, overall analyses of QRISs suggest that these systems may reinforce inequities for FCC educators.⁶ Thus, requirements based on QRIS standards may present a barrier to FCC educators being able to deliver public PreK. Other eligibility requirements (discussed in previous briefs in this series⁷) may also present challenges for FCC educator participation in PreK.

Child Enrollment Rules

Some PreK system child enrollment rules may be challenging for FCC educators who care for mixed-age groups of children and those rules may not support continuity of care over time.

Unlike a preschool classroom, an individual FCC educator may only have one or two preschool-age children at any given time. FCC educators who want to maintain their mixed-age groups might be reluctant to participate in PreK (see box 3). They may see the effort to comply with PreK requirements as outweighing the benefits of participation if only one or two children will be funded.

“Family child care will typically only have one or two eligible PreK students. ... To formally partner with the school for potentially a minimal amount of money—is that really going to make it worthwhile for the teacher or the director?”

—Maine Department of Education administrator

Data Tracking

State and local PreK systems recognize the importance of collecting and coordinating data across multiple early care and education systems. California and Vermont are in the process of developing integrated early childhood data systems. California's investment comes from the Preschool Development Grant, and Vermont's data system investment will be made possible with state tax funds.

Washington and Maryland have existing early childhood integrated data systems. These systems allow linkages of program-level data across early care and education programs (e.g., early intervention, special education, state PreK, subsidized child care). These states are able to link data on licensing status, curriculum, class size, staff ratio, professional development opportunities, wages, benefits, turnover, quality, and classroom ratings. Washington and Maryland have the capacity to connect some child-level data with their K-12 data systems over time. Washington hosts a particularly robust data system that can link workforce data (e.g., education,

professional development, demographics, wage supplements) and child-level data (e.g., demographics, program participation, family characteristics, screening, and assessment) across some of its early care and education programs.

Box 3



FCC Educator Perspective

Child Enrollment Minimums

Current system models with minimum enrollment requirements may not adequately support FCC educators⁸ who serve mixed-age groups and prioritize continuity of care. The combination of minimum enrollment requirements and expectations for kindergarten readiness may impose extensive learning demands within a limited timeframe for children and FCC educators. Meeting these demands, along with the necessity to fulfill requirements across multiple, potentially uncoordinated systems, is perceived by some educators as unrealistic and a barrier to their participation. For example, in Florida, FCC programs must have a minimum of four preschool-age children enrolled to receive public PreK funding. For FCC educators, this may mean having to enroll new 4-year-old children just for one year to have enough children in this age group, or periodically losing PreK funding as children age in and out of eligibility. This poses a challenge for FCC educators who usually care for children over many years from infancy or toddlerhood through kindergarten entry.

“[A challenge] for me is not knowing if I will be able to meet what is expected for the child because ... the child may have not been with me throughout the years. And they come, and it’s so much for them to learn in such a short time. So that is something that I would be reluctant to do.”

—Florida FCC educator

State and local PreK systems affirm that data systems facilitate their commitments to promoting equity across services and programs.

Through enhanced utilization, sharing, and integration of data, a state can enhance investments and quality in early childhood programs and its workforce, broaden access to high-quality programs, correct and ultimately improve outcomes for children and early childhood professionals, especially those who have been historically and systematically marginalized.⁹ In Washington, for example, the state’s integrated data system is helping the state move toward the elimination of racial disproportionality, one of its strategic priorities. Toward this end, the state has also established an office devoted to measuring, tracking, and reporting on racial and ethnic equity accountability metrics in addition to identifying drivers and unintended consequences.

Some state and local PreK systems offer critical supports to ensure FCC educators can meet the data collection requirements of the PreK system.

FCC programs are required to track and share the same data as other programs (e.g., child care centers and public schools). Required data include child demographics, attendance, family support, and staff information. In Maryland, the intermediary organization provides data tracking services as well software, hardware and training for child data tracking to FCC educators in its program, but finds that some educators still struggle with technology access and proficiency. Washington’s PreK system provides technology support to FCC educators around data collection, recognizing that FCC educators, who often lack administrative staff, may need additional support in this area.

“So for family child care homes, you know, they’re the teacher, they’re the director, they’re everything. And then they have this requirement of entering data. There’s a capacity issue and just learning how to navigate these new systems that they are required to enter data into.”

—Washington state administrator

None of the PreK systems in our focus groups offer FCC educators payment or incentives around data collection. However, some PreK systems provide FCC educators with access to data reports that allow them to view their annual assessment data. Washington and the Pajaro Valley Unified School District in California indicate that they provide options for educators to compare their data to kindergarten assessment scores and data for other children in the state and/or district.

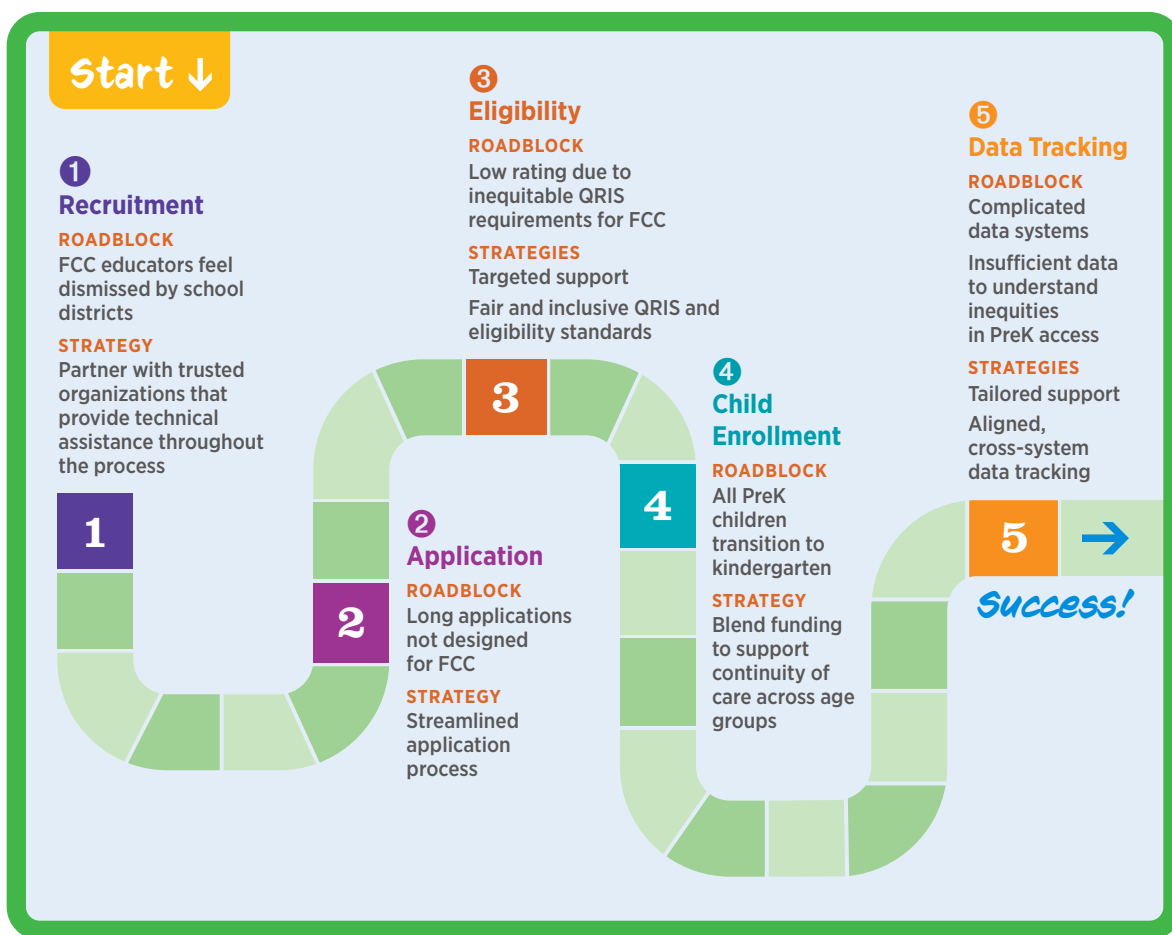
Promising Approaches to PreK Funding Procurement, Child Enrollment, and Data Tracking

Based on our focus group conversations with PreK administrators, we identified several promising approaches related to recruitment, child enrollment, eligibility for PreK funding procurement, and data tracking. The focus on alignment of PreK system requirements with other early care and education systems was echoed across participating systems

Figure 1

Roadmap to PreK in FCC

Based on our focus group discussions with PreK administrators we identified several strategies for overcoming current challenges in the implementation of publicly funded PreK delivery in FCC settings. Roadblocks such as inequitable QRIS rating requirements and child enrollment rules can be mitigated through blended funding and tailored and inclusive standards that honor the strengths and assets that FCC educators provide. By intentionally (re)designing PreK systems, we can unlock pathways to equitable access and enriched early childhood education for all.



in our focus groups. Intentional efforts to align PreK requirements with QRIS as well as integrate PreK data systems with other child-serving systems are reflective of core principles for equitable inclusion of FCC in mixed-delivery PreK.¹ Some promising approaches include:

Recruitment of FCC programs into PreK systems

- **Enact equitable recruitment practices that value FCC educators and the families they serve by proactively tailoring recruitment methods specific to underrepresented early childhood educators, such as those offering FCC.**

Traditional recruitment approaches often contain inherent biases and rely on familiar networks and communication channels. These methods may favor already participating, and often larger, PreK programs, perpetuating existing inequities that undermine efforts to successfully engage FCC educators in mixed-delivery PreK systems.

- **Implement focused outreach and recruitment strategies for FCC by partnering with school districts, FCC networks, and intermediary organizations to publicize the benefits of including FCC in mixed-delivery systems.**
- **Create pipelines for recruitment of FCC into PreK by employing a more holistic birth-to-age-5 view and aligning with existing child care licensing and QRIS structures that may already have tailored standards and approaches for FCC.**

Recruiting and preparing more FCCs will help to build more capacity for PreK and fill critical child care gaps in localities nationwide.

Applications for PreK funding

- **Attend to equity by creating application and eligibility processes and procedures that reduce barriers to participation for FCC educators.**
- **Offer equitable and accessible technical assistance through intermediaries and school districts to FCC educators around application completion and submission.**
- **Increase access to PreK by offering applications in languages other than English and making applications (and reapplications) FCC-friendly (e.g., clearly delineating or eliminating questions that are not relevant for FCC settings).**

Program eligibility and child enrollment

- **Use caution when requiring a certain QRIS rating level for PreK eligibility, as this may reinforce existing inequities across systems.**
- **Ensure that offering PreK does not disrupt the continuity of care for existing families in FCC, including by blending funding and/or allowing educators caring for future PreK students to remain active in the PreK system.**

Data tracking

- **Align PreK data systems with other early care and education data systems (e.g., QRIS and Head Start).**
- **Collect system-level data needed to track equitable access and utilization of programs and services, as well as workforce needs.**
- **Support FCC educators in collecting and reporting required data.**

Methodology

PreK administrators from the 26 states, 12 cities, and six counties that allow FCC to deliver public PreK were contacted via email to participate in a one-time focus group about recruitment, eligibility, and data tracking for PreK in FCC. In total, two focus groups were held with a mixture of state and local PreK systems represented. Six administrators and intermediaries spoke about PreK in four states and one locality; all participants responded to a demographic survey. Most participants were women (83%). All focus group participants identified as White. Participants had been working in their PreK system for between 3 and 17 years (mean = 6.92). In addition, responses from an earlier focus group where two government representatives (one female and Black, and one female and Latina) from another locality (San Antonio) discussed recruitment strategies are also highlighted in this brief.

Limitations. Our focus group conversations were limited to administrators from PreK systems that allow FCC to deliver public PreK and to the people from states and localities who signed up to participate based on their interest in PreK in FCC settings. Thus, we cannot generalize to PreK systems not represented in our focus groups, such as those that exclude FCC

participation at all levels. While we note many ways that public PreK systems are creating pathways and opportunities to include FCC, they may not look the same, given the diversity of contexts across states and local communities. Finally, the information collected was from PreK administrators and intermediary organization staff and not FCC educators, who may have different perspectives about the supports and barriers related to recruitment, eligibility, and data tracking in state or local PreK systems.

Endnotes

- 1 Melvin, S.A., Bromer, J., Iruka, I.U., Hallam, R., & Hustedt, J. (2022). *A transformative vision for the authentic inclusion of family child care in mixed-delivery PreK systems*. Erikson Institute.
- 2 Opinions, quotes, and anecdotes shared by participants do not represent the views of their larger state/city, agency, or organization.
- 3 Educator perspectives come from the PreK in FCC Project's Educator Advisory Board, which consists of FCC educators who offer publicly funded PreK in their states or localities. The states and localities represented by these educators may be different from the states and localities of those who attended our focus groups.
- 4 Melvin, S.A., Reinoso, L., Bromer, J., Hallam, R., Hustedt, J., Morgan, J.A., & Iruka, I.U. (2023). *Strategies toward the equitable implementation of PreK in family child care: Infrastructure and support, Issue 3*. The Family Child Care in PreK Project Brief Series. Erikson Institute, University of Delaware, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- 5 Lewis, S., Hallam, R., Hustedt, J., Bromer, J., Melvin, S.A., Iruka, I.U., & Morgan, J.A. (2023). *Strategies toward the equitable implementation of PreK in family child care: Curriculum, assessment, developmental screening, and monitoring, Issue 2*. The Family Child Care in PreK Project Brief Series. Erikson Institute, University of Delaware, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- 6 Meek, S., Iruka, I.U., Soto-Boykin, X., Blevins, D., Alexander, B., Cardona, M., & Castro, D. (2021). *Equity is quality, quality is equity: Operationalizing equity in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems*. The Children's Equity Project & Child Care Aware of America. <https://cep.asu.edu/Equity-is-Quality-and-Quality-is-Equity>
Melvin, S.A. (2022). *Reconceptualizing quality in family child care: Unpacking provider perceptions of quality and their implications for alignment and engagement with Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (Brief Report)*. Erikson Institute. https://www.erikson.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/RECONCEPTUALIZING_QUALITY_IN_FCC.pdf
- 7 Learn more about FCC eligibility requirements and policy implementation strategies in the briefs *Qualifications and Compensation, Issue 1* and *Curriculum, Assessment, Screening, and Monitoring, Issue 2*.
- 8 Educator perspectives come from the PreK in FCC Project's Educator Advisory Board, which consists of FCC educators who offer publicly funded PreK in their states or localities. The states and localities represented by these educators may be different from the states and localities of those who attended our focus groups.
- 9 King, C. (2022). *Integrated early childhood data is an essential tool for advancing racial and ethnic equity*. Child Trends.

About the Partners

The PreK in Family Child Care project is a collaboration of Erikson Institute's Herr Research Center, the University of North Carolina Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute's Equity Research Action Coalition, and the University of Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood.

Home-Based Child Care Research at Erikson Institute's Herr Research Center

www.erikson.edu/research/prek-in-family-child-care-project-pkfcc

Erikson Institute educates, inspires, and promotes leadership to serve the needs of children and families. As part of that mission, the Herr Research Center develops original scholarship and research that shapes the early childhood field. Since 2008, the Home-Based Child Care (HBCC) Research focus area has conducted rigorous and actionable research to inform early care and education policy and program design and decision-making. Through national, multistate, and local projects and participatory approaches, Erikson's HBCC Research group partners with professionals and communities to highlight promising strategies for supporting equity for the home-based child care workforce and quality for children and families who use home-based child care.

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood at the University of Delaware

www.dieec.udel.edu

The Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC) strives to improve the quality of early care and education throughout the state and beyond by providing exemplary professional development and program-level supports to all sectors of the early care and education community. DIEEC conducts policy-relevant research that helps advance equity, promote the early childhood workforce, and enhance the lives of young children and their families.

Equity Research Action Coalition at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

equity-coalition.fpg.unc.edu

The Equity Research Action Coalition, a university-based collaborative, focuses on co-constructing with practitioners and policymakers actionable research and evaluation to support the optimal development of Black children and other children of color prenatally through childhood. The coalition works at the intersection of research, program, and practice through anti-racist and cultural wealth frameworks. The coalition focuses on developing a science-based action framework to eradicate the impact of racism and all its consequences on the lives of Black children, families, and communities and other children and families from marginalized communities, and to ensure their optimal health, wealth, and well-being.

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