The Leadership Conference Education Fund

Civil Rights Principles for Early Care and Education (ECE)

March 2022

The Civil Rights Principles for Early Care and Education were developed collaboratively by members of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and by The Leadership Conference Education Fund. The coalition sought to identify fundamental elements of the whole early child care and education system that protect civil rights and advance equity for children, families, staff, and providers. The coalition continues to engage and educate diverse stakeholders and policymakers in pursuit of an early care and education system that offers meaningful equal opportunity and success for all children, especially those who have been historically marginalized.

In order to ensure that children and families have access to and are included in comprehensive, diverse, and high-quality early care and education settings, we seek policy that reflects the following principles. The civil rights community calls on decisionmakers at all levels to create and maintain an equitable early care and education system for children, families, and providers by incorporating these principles into all relevant policies.

Civil Rights Principles for Early Care and Education (ECE)

PRINCIPLE #1: INCLUSION AND NON-DISCRIMINATION Children and families must have access to and be included in all early care and education (ECE) programs without regard to their immigration status, disability or developmental delay, family income, race, ethnicity, religion, family configuration, sex (including sexual orientation or gender identity), age of the parent, preferred language, nationality, housing status, or involvement in the child welfare system. In order to understand whether our system is providing for equal opportunity for high quality early care and learning, families, providers, advocates, researchers, and policymakers need access to comprehensive, publicly reported, disaggregated data.

PRINCIPLE #2: CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CARE ECE settings must be culturally and linguistically responsive and developmentally appropriate for all children. For children from families that speak languages other than English, programs must support the continued development of a child's home language(s) while the acquisition of English is facilitated. Children's home language should be regarded as cultural resources and receive recognition and respect. ECE programs must support children's healthy growth and development (including social-emotional development) and school readiness (early literacy, early numeracy, cognitive skills). Families have the right to self-identify/self-define and are regarded as experts and partners in all aspects of service planning and implementation. States, districts, agencies, and programs must use system wide, proactive, positive, and culturally and linguistically responsive approaches to children's development. Educators must receive free, ongoing, and frequent high quality professional development and coaching in these approaches, available in multiple modes and languages.

PRINCIPLE #3: PARENT/FAMILY/CAREGIVER INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION Parents and families (including chosen families) are young children's first and most important teachers and bring a wealth of knowledge concerning their children's development, learning, and cultural identities to early childhood care and education. Two- and three-generation approaches build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and their family configuration. Parents/families must be informed and involved in decision-making about their own children and about the early childhood program in which their child(ren) are educated. Early childhood programs must also provide information and support to families to help them understand child development, support their young child's learning and development at home, and learn leadership skills to help improve early childhood systems.

PRINCIPLE #4: DIVERSE, HEALTHY, AND SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS ECE settings must be good places to work where staff are treated fairly with dignity and respect, with fair and equitable compensation and appropriate staffing levels, and where staff are supported in creating positive environments for diverse children and families — including with ongoing professional development, coaching, and career and wage ladders.

PRINCIPLE #5: DIVERSE AND ACCESSIBLE EARLY CARE SETTINGS ECE settings must reflect the needs of individual children, families, and communities, including center-based programs, family child care homes, school-based programs, and family friend and neighbor care serving children from birth until enrollment in kindergarten. Families must be provided assistance in overcoming barriers to participation, including transportation, translation, and accommodations. Children with disabilities must be provided with the individualized services and support that they need in inclusive settings.

PRINCIPLE #6: PRIORITIZE MARGINALIZED CHILDREN ON THE PATH TO UNIVERSAL PROGRAMS Policymakers must ensure children and families who have been historically marginalized — including children with disabilities or delays, families with low incomes, communities of color, immigrant families, Native communities, LGBTQIA-led families, families who are experiencing homelessness or are mobile, and those who live in rural areas — are prioritized for the receipt of child care assistance and universal preschool services. Quality improvement and supply-building activities must also be offered and accessible to these communities during the initial years of implementation of a system geared toward providing universal, or near-universal, access to ECE. Effective outreach to ensure that families are aware of services available to them, and that families are able to access them, must be undertaken.

PRINCIPLE #7: INCLUSIVE AND PROACTIVE DECISION-MAKING Parents/families/caregivers, community members, staff, and providers are experts, and their voices must be included in the decision-making that occurs at every stage of systems development — federal, state, and local. Families', staff members', and providers' input must be proactively sought, gathered, and integrated into policy reviews and policymaking. Parents and families must be positioned to support each other in growing as leaders in the care of their own children and all children. Information must be provided in a language that parents understand.

PRINCIPLE #8: REJECT THE CRIMINALIZATION AND EXCLUSION OF YOUNG CHILDREN Exclusionary discipline and criminalization practices are developmentally inappropriate and ineffective, and they disproportionately marginalize children of color, Native children, and children with disabilities and delays. No ECE program should use physically or psychologically harmful discipline practices, including corporal punishment, suspension, expulsion, seclusion, or restraint. Providers must receive sufficient support and resources to meet the behavioral needs of children in culturally affirming and developmentally appropriate ways.

PRINCIPLE #9: SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE FUNDING FOR HEAD START AND EXPAND INCOME ELIGIBILITY Head Start and Early Head Start (EHS), including Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) and American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start, must receive significantly more funding to ensure all currently eligible children have access to these comprehensive, high-quality early childhood programs. Additional funding must also be available to increase access for families above the current income limits.

PRINCIPLE #10: QUALITY ROOTED IN EQUITY As states, districts, agencies, and programs engage in the urgent and important work of quality improvement to support healthy child development, affirm parental priorities and decision-making, and provide support and resources for all providers, understanding of quality must be rooted in equity. In addition to cultural responsiveness in all measures of quality, intentionality is needed to ensure that providers (particularly those who have been excluded from current quality improvement efforts, such as family child care settings, license-exempt providers, providers of color, and multilingual providers) with particular experience and expertise in responsively serving children from marginalized backgrounds are included in the design, measurement, and funding of quality improvement measures that remove barriers to high-quality child care.

Signed By:

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Leadership Conference Education Fund
American Atheists
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center for Learner Equity
Child Care Aware of America
Children's Defense Fund
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Committee for Children
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Family Equality
Feminist Majority Foundation
Hispanic Federation
Human Rights Campaign
Impact Fund
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Black Child Development Institute
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE)
National Center for Youth Law
National Council of Jewish Women
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Education Association
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
National Indian Education Association (NIEA)
National Migrant & Seasonal Head Start Association
National Organization for Women Foundation
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
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