

A photograph of a person in mid-air, jumping over a cliff edge. The person is wearing a green plaid shirt, dark pants, and brown shoes. The cliff is made of reddish-brown earth and has some sparse, dry vegetation on top. The background is a clear blue sky.

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Closing the Opportunity Gap for Young Children

CCEEPRC Conference
June 29, 2023

Agenda

- **Report background**
- **Key findings about opportunity gaps**
 - ECE
 - Socio-emotional
 - Other outcomes (K-3 education, physical health)
- **Recommendations**
- **Small group discussion**
 - What are you working on that addresses opportunity gaps related to ECE or socio-emotional outcomes?
- **Q&A/open discussion**

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Committee Members

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- **ALFREDO J. ARTILES**, Lee L. Jacks Professor of Education, Stanford University
- **RENEE BOYNTON-JARRETT**, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center Vital Village Networks, Boston University School of Medicine
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- **SHANTEL E. MEEK**, Professor of Practice and Founding Director, The Children's Equity Project, Arizona State University
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- **SARAH PERUMATTAM**, Research Assistant (from October 2021 until May 2022)
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ASHLEY DARCY-MAHONEY, Professor, Director of Infant Research, Autism & Neurodevelopmental Disorders Institute; Chair, Community of Policy, Populations and Systems, George Washington University School of Nursing

Statement of Task

An ad hoc committee will conduct a consensus study on the causes and consequences of the opportunity gap for young children from birth to age eight.

The committee will:

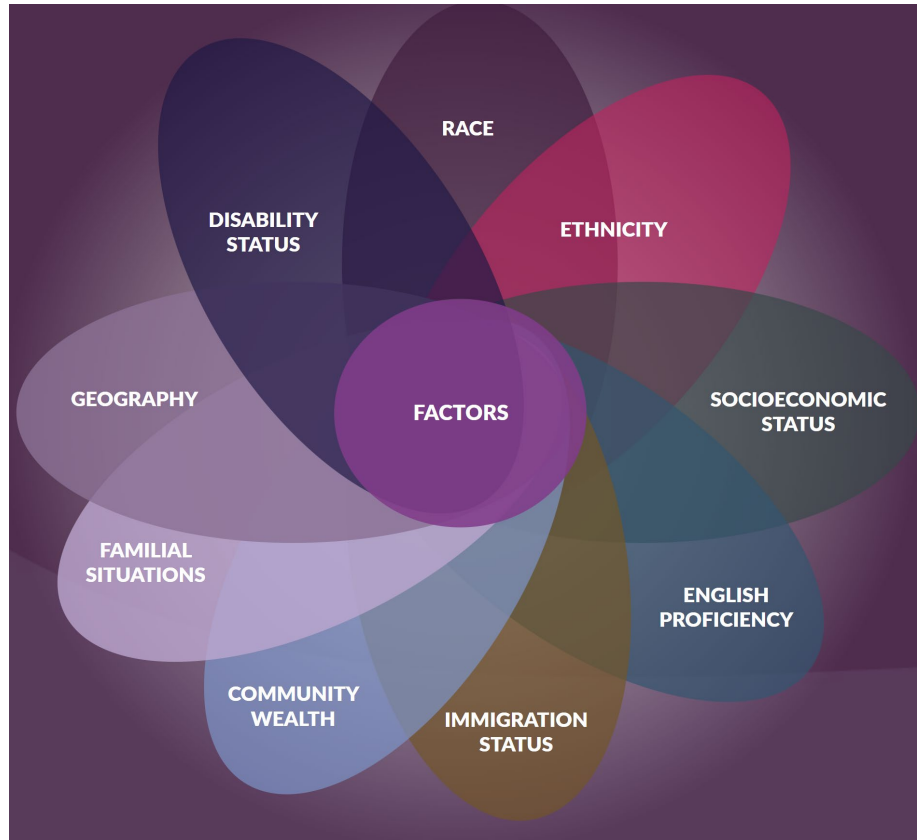
- Identify and describe the opportunity gap (the potential causes—societal conditions that preclude equal access to high-quality educational opportunities) and its relationship, if any, with the achievement gap (the effect—subgroups of children who demonstrate lower performance than others and subgroups of children who do not achieve at a recognized level of performance).
- Review available research on the effects of the opportunity gap on children from birth to age eight and its relationship to demographic characteristics and institutional racism and discrimination.
- Review available evidence on family and community factors, and pre-K to grade 3 school factors, that promote, mitigate, or diminish opportunities and achievement for children.
- Discuss the economic costs posed by the opportunity gap and the potential economic benefits of investing in strategies, interventions, and policies to addressing opportunity gap concerns for children from birth to age eight.
- Review evidence on promising federal and state government policy and program interventions that have addressed opportunity gap concerns for children from birth to age eight.
- Develop recommendations for education policy, practice, and research to better understand the opportunity gap and promote success for all students pre-K to grade 3.
- Identify how the potential roles, actions and supports appropriate for philanthropy to can assist in addressing the opportunity gap for young children from birth to age eight.

Defining the Opportunity Gap



The unequal and inequitable distribution of resources and experiences on the basis of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, disability, immigration status, community wealth, familial situations, geography, or other factors that contribute to or perpetuate inequities in well-being across groups of young children in health, social emotional development, and education.

Opportunity Gap: inequitable distribution can be based on the intersecting of factors





Structural Drivers of Opportunity Gaps

Children of color, children with disabilities, and children living in poverty have been harmed by structural factors that have created and perpetuated gaps in opportunity for young children, including:

- Systematic exclusion
- Structural racism
- Unequal allocation of resources and services
- Labor market inequalities
- Biases in access to services
- Policies that create administrative burden for families

Opportunity Gaps in Early Childhood Care and Education From Birth to Pre-k



Historical/Structural Drivers of Inequities in ECE

- Devaluation of work done by women and people of color
- Ambivalence towards women, work, and role of government
- Child development as a recent rationale for ECE
- Lack of consensus on purpose of ECE
 - Work support or child development
 - Who needs/deserves it?
- Lack of coherence in today's ECE "system"
 - Goals for children
 - Program standards and funding
 - Eligibility



Access

- Despite well-documented benefits of high quality ECE, publicly-funded ECE programs lack funding to serve all eligible children.
- Children from historically marginalized communities are less likely to have access.
 - Income
 - Race
 - Age
 - Children with Disabilities
- Eligible families may not be able to access programs due to lack of knowledge, language and cultural barriers, and administrative burdens.





Child Care Technical Assistance Network

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Creating a family-friendly child care assistance application

The Office of Child Care (OCC) is committed to reducing the burden on families applying for Child Care Development and Fund (CCDF) child care assistance. This guide can help Lead Agencies revise the content and format of your applications to make them simpler for families. [Learn more about why we created this guide for Lead Agencies and how to use it.](#)

Experiences

Children from historically underserved and marginalized populations are likely to have lower quality experiences in those programs. Their experiences are shaped by policies and practices such as:



Exclusive use
of English in
instruction



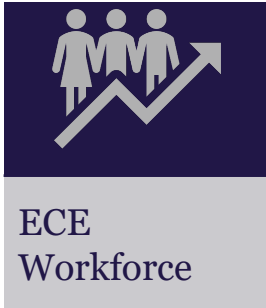
Harsh, exclusionary, and
developmentally inappropriate
discipline policies



Lack of supports
for children with
disabilities

Experiences

Children from historically underserved and marginalized populations are likely to have lower quality experiences in those programs. Their experiences are shaped by policies and practices such as:

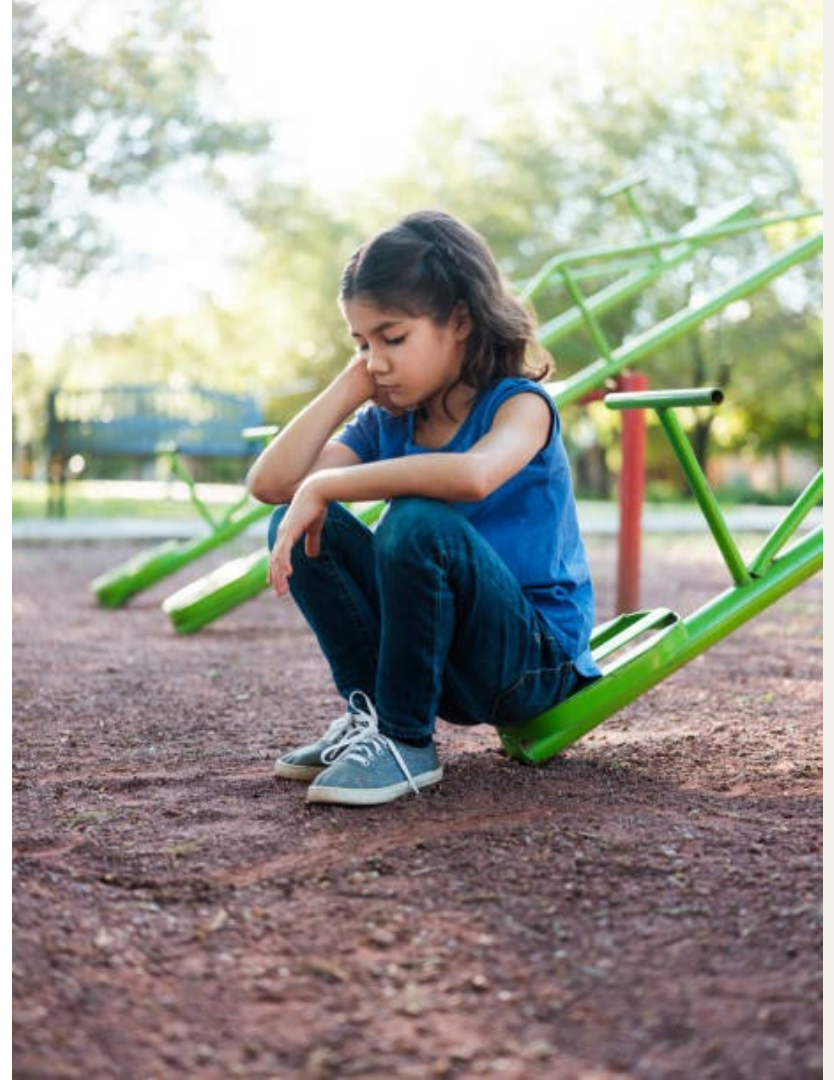


Opportunity Gaps Related To Social-emotional Development and Well-being



Mental health supports

- Chronic poverty has been associated with higher rates of mental health problems among young children.
- Yet, young children from low socioeconomic and specific racial and ethnic backgrounds have less access to the resources and conditions that promote mental health.
- When young children from low-income families or individuals from minoritized groups need mental health care services, they are less likely to have their needs met.



Supports for families



Children thrive when their parents have the resources and support to attend to their needs.



Families from low socioeconomic and specific racial and ethnic backgrounds are relatively less aware of existing resources and are less able to access resources that they need to help support themselves and their child's social-emotional development and well-being.



Some parents are exposed to more stress because of poor work conditions and poor living environments, which can affect their children's well-being.

Opportunity Gaps in Grades K-3

- Funding
- Representation in Special Education
- Exposure to harsh and exclusive disciplinary policies



Opportunity Gaps Related to Physical Health

- Prenatal conditions and care for the mother
- Health care and nutrition for young children
- Safe and healthy environments



Recommendations



Summary of Recommendations to Reduce Opportunity Gaps

1. Support Equity-Focused Policy Research and Monitoring Infrastructure to Guide Policies that Close Opportunity Gaps
2. Establish Early Learning Opportunities as a Right of All Children
3. Federally Fund Universal High Quality Early Care and Education
4. Equitably Support Elementary School Education and Out-of-School Programs
5. Fully Integrate Individuals with IDEA Programming with General Early Childhood and K-12 Education
6. HHS should Lead an Interagency Group on Children's Mental Health
7. Update and Enforce Existing Labor Standards and Employment Policies
8. Support Policies and Interventions that Target Social Determinants of Health that Perpetuate Opportunity Gaps
9. Put in Place Policies to Address Institutional Racism and Reduce Inequities

Recommendation 1

Federal entities and agencies and private philanthropic organizations that collect data and fund research related to child health and development should create and adequately support an effective equity-focused policy- and services-monitoring data infrastructure (collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, data analysis, and program evaluation) to guide federal, state, and local policy decisions aimed at closing the opportunity gap across income, race/ethnicity, disability, gender, language background, and immigrant status. This data infrastructure should also be made available for research and learning.

Recommendation 2

The federal government and states should establish early learning opportunities—accompanied by both legal accountability guaranteeing access and inclusive, intentional quality standards that are aligned with scientific evidence—as a right afforded to all children and families who need and want services.

Recommendation 3

The federal government—in partnership with states— should fully implement a voluntary universal high-quality public early care and education system using a targeted universal approach (i.e., setting universal goals that are pursued using processes and strategies targeted to the needs of different groups). Such programs should be responsive to community needs, reflect the true cost of quality, and have strong monitoring and accountability systems that specifically address gaps in opportunity.

Recommendation 5

The U.S. Department of Education should fully integrate Individuals with Disabilities Education Act programming with general early childhood and K–12 education. As part of achieving this goal, the U.S. Department of Education, states, and districts should undertake specific reforms explicitly addressing opportunity gaps identified in this report...

Recommendation 6

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) should create, lead, and be accountable for coordinating an interagency group focused on children's mental health and social-emotional well-being that includes the several HHS operating divisions, including the Administration for Children and Families, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, among others, as well as the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other relevant agencies, for the purpose of designing, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive system of primary psychosocial care for young children and their families.

Thank You

To read or download a copy of the report, please visit:

<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26743/>

For more information about the study or dissemination activities, please contact:

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