**E6: Closing the Opportunity Gap for Young Children (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2023 Consensus Study)**
Thursday, June 29, 2023
1:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. | *Gallery II*


1. **Descriptive Information**

| E6: Closing the Opportunity Gap for Young Children (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2023 Consensus Study)<br><br>This session will present the results of a new consensus study from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine on Exploring the Opportunity Gap for Young Children From Birth to Age Eight. This report explores the causes and consequences of the opportunity gap and makes recommendations for how to reduce gaps and make improvements across federal policies and systems that serve young children and families. The report recommendations include the establishment of early childhood education as a right for all children, equitable access to services for children with disabilities, increased federal interagency collaboration on children's mental health care, and addressing systemic barriers that families face in accessing resources. The report was sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families and several private foundations.<br><br>Two committee members will discuss the empirical evidence and the Committee's conclusions about the opportunity gap for children, which is defined as the inequitable distribution of resources and experiences based on demographic factors such as race and ethnicity, income, gender, national origin, language background, and disability. Opportunity gaps for children were examined across three domains of child development including education (ECE and K-3), physical health and social-emotional health and well-being. The discussion will also highlight the report's findings about structural inequities, both past and present, that contribute and perpetuate opportunity gaps, and short- and longer-term recommendations to reduce these inequities. | **Presenters**<br>　**Pamela Joshi,** Brandeis University<br><br>　**Albert Wat,** Alliance for Early Success<br><br>**Scribe**<br>　Lindsay Bell, ICF<br><br>**Number of Attendees:** 15 |
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2. *Documents/Presentations Shared*
   Closing the Opportunity Gap for Young Children

3. **Brief Summary of Presentation**

   - o   Statement of task – created in collaboration between funders and national academies
     - ▪   identify and describe the opportunity gap and its relationship, if any, to the achievement gap
     - ▪   Review available research on effects of opportunity gap on and its relationship to demographic characteristics, institutional racism, and discrimination
     - ▪   Review available research on family and community factors and Pre-K to grade 3 factors that promote or diminish opportunities for achievement
     - ▪   Discuss economic costs of opportunity gap and potential economic benefits of addressing it
     - ▪   Review evidence of promising policies and interventions that address the opportunity gap

- Identify the potential roles, actions, and supports appropriate for philanthropy to assist in addressing the opportunity gap
- Focus on early education, physical health and healthcare, social-emotional development and wellbeing
  - Focused more on structural precursors to achievement gaps and how achievement gaps can become opportunity gaps
- Definition of opportunity gap: unequal and inequitable distributions of resources and experiences on basis of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, 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.
- Refer to slide 8 for visual of intersectional approach to definition of opportunity gaps
- Opportunity gaps can affect achievement outcomes, but no evidence of causal relationship
  - Not enough causal studies
- 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
  - Historical exclusionary policies and practices to eligibility criteria today
  - Structural racism
  - Unequal allocation of resources and services
  - Labor market inequalities
  - Biases in access to services
  - Policies that create administrative burden for families
- Historical structural drivers of inequities in ECE
  - Devaluation of work by women and women and people of color – created legacy of work that is not valued, especially financially
  - Ambivalence toward women, work, and role of government in supporting women and women in work
    - Conflicting views and policies on women in the workplace, the role of ECE and women in the home, and more
  - Child development a recent rationale for ECE
  - Still a lack of consensus on the purpose of ECE – who needs it and deserves it?
  - Created a lack of coherence in today's ECE system
- Access – we know the benefits of ECE, but as a country we've fallen short of providing access to ECE and that hits historically marginalized communities harder
  - Administrative burden – not just policy, but the process of accessing the benefit creates inequities – especially due to language, cultural, and immigration status barriers
  - Disadvantages parents with variable schedules and multiple jobs
  - Child Care Technical Assistance Network has created a template for applications to reduce burden on families
- Experience – opportunity gaps experienced once families and children achieve access
  - Exclusive use of English in instruction – lack of bilingual staff, teachers lack cultural responsivity and have low expectations
  - Harsh, exclusionary, and developmentally inappropriate discipline policies
    - More in preschool than K-12 and more in children of color
    - Children that experience this early in education system also experience it more later in education, leads to disengagement
  - Lack of supports for children with disabilities
    - Preschoolers in particular lack access to opportunities with typically developing children
    - Underutilization of publicly funded pre-k for children with disabilities
  - ECE workforce – choices the families have affect the experience of children
    - Lower education levels in home-based teachers than center-based teachers
    - Center teachers more likely to use curriculum than home-based teachers
  - Program quality and pedagogy – children of color more likely to receive didactic instruction than child-directed or play-based instruction

- Teachers rate black children with imaginative and expressive play more harshly than white children
  - o Socioemotional wellbeing
    - Critical to promote mental health in EC especially to children from underprivileged and marginalized backgrounds
    - No universal system to address these gaps – families have to find resources on their own – major barrier to children's development
    - Lack of culturally informed and appropriate interventions can cause more harm
  - o Recommendations – directed at federal government
    - 9 recommendations – 2 focused on ECE [refer to slide 22 for all 9 recommendations]
    - 1. Should develop infrastructure to do this research that can inform equity-focused policymaking
      - A lot of data is not collected by the characteristics that can influence opportunity gaps
    - 2. Governments should establish early learning opportunities as a right to all children and families with legal accountability to access and inclusive, intentional quality standards
      - Reframe as public good like K-12 education
      - Start by ratifying UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
      - Possibility of using IDEA as a precedence for making ECE a legal right for children
    - 3. Federal government in partnership with states should fully implement voluntary universal high-quality public early care and education system using a targeted universal approach
      - Historical efforts at targeted investments have not ensured improved access and outcomes
      - Allocate more resources to marginalized communities
      - Build core of diverse and well supported workforce across all settings and demographics
      - Quality indicators that reflect how families experience the system
      - Would this include tribes? Not explicitly included in this recommendation
    - 5. US Department of Education should fully integrate Individuals with Disabilities Education Act programming with general early childhood and K–12 education.
      - Issues with both over and under identification of disabilities
      - Prohibition of harsh forms of discipline, including suspensions, expulsions, all forms of corporal punishment, seclusion, and inappropriate restraint for all students with disabilities, with special attention to students of color, who are disproportionately subject to these practices
      - Max federal share of funding for IDEA is 40% of average national expenditure per pupil – currently funds about 18%
    - 6. HHS interagency group focused on universal support for children's mental health and social emotional wellbeing
      - Given complexity of design, need an interagency working group – design of system informed by expertise and perspective of multiple agencies and ensure implementation is collaborative and cohesive across systems
      - Integrated data system throughout an individual's life similar to EMR

4. **Brief Summary of Discussion**
   - Add additional data to existing data systems or introduce new system?
     - o Why reinvent the wheel? But there's not an easy way to add on to existing systems
     - o Privacy concerns
     - o Adding more questions that are applicant reported creates additional burden
     - o Hard to collect data on equity, but we need to be able to measure where we are in equity, needs to be a standard of practice but it is not currently
     - o Could make the ability to use different data systems easier
   - Recommendation 5 – at child and family level as well as service provider level?
     - o Special education teachers still separate from general ECE
     - o Different service delivery – by integrating systems can increase ability for special education trained providers to go into the community care settings
     - o Federal funding requirements require us to work by specialty discipline, not together

- o Teacher education should prepare all educators to provide care for all students
  - o Could move to a model similar to nursing with a general competency and specializations
- How do we get to a solution without a national initiative? Should be national rather than state by state
  - o Need a universal standard
  - o Indian Health Service uses a universal system in Alaska – now have decades of data from full records – has been implemented in other countries since
- What do we do with this report? How can we promote these findings?
  - o Try to find a philanthropic funder that can find a model program that aligns with the recommendations for publication on what works
  - o Need inventory of what we have – need to make getting information easier

5. **Summary of Key issues raised** (facilitators are encouraged to spend the last 3-5 minutes of sessions summarizing the key issues raised during the session; bullets below are prompts for capturing the kinds of issues we're looking for)

- There is no evidence to support a causal relationship between opportunity and achievement gaps, but there is evidence that suggests opportunity gaps can affect achievement outcomes.
- Need to get more data on opportunity and achievement gaps that includes characteristics associated with those disparities in access and experience (race, ethnicity, language, ability, immigration status, socioeconomic status)
- As a result of the study, the following recommendations were made to the federal and state governments:
  - o Develop infrastructure to support collecting equity data
  - o Establish early learning as a right, with legal accountability
  - o Voluntary universal early care and education through federal government in partnership with states
  - o Fully integrate IDEA programming with general education
  - o HHS interagency group on universal support for children's mental health and wellbeing