

Why Juneteenth Matters

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Leaders of high-quality early childhood programs continually reevaluate how their programs operate. They consider what is important to their enrolled families and changes in the external environment as well. In 2023, Juneteenth became a federal holiday, causing program directors and administrators to consider changes to their holiday calendars. It also gave many the opportunity to think about how and what to teach young children about our country's history. That is why I am already thinking ahead to Juneteenth as we celebrate Black History month this February. As we approach the second federal acknowledgment of Juneteenth, leaders have the chance to build upon what they did last year.

The Juneteenth holiday represents an important moment in American history. Juneteenth is also called Emancipation Day and marks the actual end of slavery in the United States. Many people mistake January 1, 1863, as the end of slavery. However, although the original [Emancipation Proclamation](#) was made on January 1, 1863, it was difficult to enforce in areas still under Confederate control. Specifically in western Texas, about 250,000 black people remained enslaved until over two years later. On June 19, 1865, Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, and freed the remaining people by an executive decree. This day came to be known as "[Juneteenth](#)" by the newly freed people in Texas. Those freed began to refer to the day as Juneteenth.

In 2021, President Biden signed legislation making Juneteenth a federal holiday. [President Biden stated](#), "*Making Juneteenth a federal holiday was only one part of my Administration's efforts to advance racial equity and ensure that America lives up to its highest ideals.*" This continues to make me think about how things have changed, yet some things have remained the same over time. It took one hundred and fifty-eight years, and now this day is a national holiday.

While we are four months away from Juneteenth, you can start brainstorming how you might want to celebrate the holiday in your own early care and education program. Ways African Americans have celebrated Juneteenth include parades, picnics, exhibits, and festivals. Here are a few ideas to get you thinking:

- Visit an African American Museum.
 - Meet with staff before and after the visit to discuss what you learned, what you felt, and how you might be able to engage with children and families in gaining a better understanding of Black History.
- Discuss what you have learned or didn't learn about Juneteenth.
 - Share your personal understanding of Juneteenth and how you came to learn about it, how you celebrate it, or if you celebrate at all.

- Be a visionary of fun ideas.
 - Create an environment during Juneteenth that allows children to learn while having fun.
- Engage in cultural activities that can help staff and families learn from one another.
 - Host cultural festivals or events with exhibits and food from different cultures.
- Engage with businesses and organizations owned by African Americans.

My family and I dine at African-American-owned restaurants on Juneteenth to support their businesses. This year, my organization will collaborate with another non-profit organization to host a Juneteenth community festival.

Participating in these activities will enhance our understanding of one another, bridging the gaps that have kept us divided.

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