

Leading with Equity

These past 18 months have been a period of reckoning for the early childhood education and care (ECEC) community. Think about the metaphor regarding perspective: *What do you see, the “forest” (in the background) or the “trees” (in the foreground and the focus of attention)?* Serving young children and their families during the time of COVID-19 has revealed substantial inequities for the ECEC workforce and an overall instability in our profession. We are at an inflection point. Attention to equity and social justice **and** attention to the quality of the teaching and leading workforce are vital to our profession’s sustainability and ability to meet the needs of young children and families. We must see the *forest* and the *trees* at the same time. Now is the time to advocate for policies and investments that advance equity and quality.

The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University is currently engaged in focus group research maintaining the twin foci of promoting social justice and racial equity **and** advancing a unified professional framework for the preparation and support of cross-sector ECEC program administrators—directors, principals, and family child care professionals—working in centers, schools, and homes. The *Leading with Equity—Building Leaders* project, supported by the Foundation for Child Development, examines the racial equity and social justice impact of the [Five Consensus Recommendations](#). What is unique about this research is that it considers the racial equity and social justice impact of professional preparation and support recommendations **before** promoting any changes to current policy at the local, state, or federal levels.

The *Leading with Equity—Building Leaders* project furthers and deepens the consensus-building [research conducted last year](#). The purpose of the initial research project, also supported by the Foundation for Child Development, was to build consensus on the need for a unified professional framework for all ECEC program leaders, determine the minimum professional preparation requirements and core competencies for all ECEC program leaders, and establish criteria for compensation parity for program leaders across ECEC sectors and settings.

At the culmination of 14 virtual sessions with 207 racially and ethnically diverse ECEC leaders coming from 32 states and the District of Columbia, consensus was reached on five recommendations pertaining to a unified professional framework for ECEC leaders. The online platform (Advanced Strategy Lab) provided opportunity for simultaneous and anonymous responses to both structured and open-ended questions. Participants were asked to rate the anonymous responses visible to all. The highest-ranked responses were then included in subsequent and iterative sessions. This unique methodology to build consensus (reached when at least 80% of respondents *support or strongly support* a specific recommendation) created an inclusive shared space in which all voices were equally influential. However, it was not possible to disaggregate the responses by race or ethnicity to understand the degree of agreement with each recommendation by those leaders representing under-resourced communities of color.

The current *Leading with Equity—Building Leaders* research project is designed to answer the following questions. To what degree do leaders of color support the Five Consensus Recommendations? Are there any perceived barriers to achieving equitable outcomes if the recommendations are implemented? If so, what specific workplace strategies, higher education supports, or policy changes are needed prior to implementation of the recommendations in order to ensure equitable outcomes? With this research,

the McCormick Center addresses the need for both increased equity and enhanced quality. There is no either/or dichotomy—both the *forest* and the *trees* are seen and valued.

The results of this research study will be available in the summer of 2022. Please contact Teri Talan at the McCormick Center, teri.talan@nl.edu, if you want more information about the research questions or design.

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