Reflections and Recommendations from Interviews with Eight Early Childhood Education Policy Leaders of Color:

Why Is Everyone at the Policy Tables So White?

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Imperatives

As one of the interviewees for this paper stated, "we need a reckoning" on the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the early childhood policy workforce and on the critical need to adopt a racial equity approach to the policy and advocacy work. As the United States becomes a minority-majority country, there is an even greater urgency to ensuring that the policies for children, families, and communities address head on the structural and institutional conditions that hold families and communities back from economic, education, and health success.

One of the policy leaders interviewed for this paper stressed that we need to approach all of our public policy questions and solutions with concern for those children, families, and communities "furthest from opportunity at the starting point" to achieve racial equity. Early childhood education is no different than these other social policy areas; indeed, although there have been gains in building and financing systems for high-quality programs and services for young children and their families, the racial and ethnic disparities in access to and affordability remain large.

Another imperative for a racially and ethnically diverse early childhood education policy workforce is the pace of early childhood education policy developments, whether at the national, state, or local levels. While policy attention to early childhood education is growing, the professional policy capacity is not meeting the demand. Several of the leaders interviewed for this paper point out how predominantly white leadership of organizations and policy tables leaves out authentic voices of people of color and often fails to raise the implications for racial equity in setting policy agendas and enacting advocacy strategies.

There are windows of opportunity as well. More organizations, including philanthropies, are examining their own institutional racial and ethnic biases, both the diversity of the leadership, the culture of the organization, and the grounding of the organization's work in achieving racial equity. There are more professional fellowships that are focused on building and supporting policy leaders of color. There are more reports examining racial and ethnic diversity among nonprofit leadership and programs to support more people of color to run for public office.

Few reports examine racial and ethnic diversity among the ranks of people working in public policy and advocacy positions generally. A few papers and some conference sessions have addressed the lack of diversity in these policy positions specific to early childhood education. In 2010, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment published a report examining three California "infrastructure" organizations (child care resource and referral programs, local First 5 commissions, and child care coordinators) and urged more attention to the staff in these settings and to their leadership development as an "essential sector of the early care and education community."[1] Dr. Lea Austin's doctoral dissertation in 2014, *Toward a Theory of Essential Experiences, Skills and Knowledge for Effective Early Care and Education Change Agents,*[2] provides a rich investigation through literature review, survey and interviews of the racial and generational tensions, challenges and opportunities for diversifying the field, and supporting the leadership of early childhood education professionals.

Purpose of the paper

At the 2018 QRIS National Conference of the BUILD Initiative, attended by more than a thousand people, a plenary session took on this problem. The session, "Why are all the white people sitting at the policy tables?" was led by four established policy advocacy leaders of color in the field. The conversation was powerful on many levels, but a thread throughout the session was the phenomenon of "gatekeeping" by white advocates.

[1] Whitebook, M., Sakai, L., & Kipnis, F. 2010. Beyond homes and centers: The workforce in three California early childhood infrastructure organizations. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California at Berkeley.

[2] Austin, L. 2014. Early Care and Education Leadership: Toward a Theory of Essential Experiences, Skills and Knowledge for Effective Early Care and Education Change Agents. Dissertation, Mills College. Retrieved at https://pqdtopen.proquest.com/doc/1562269228.html?FMT=ABS

"Why are All the White People Sitting at the Policy Tables? Developing Racially/Ethnically Diverse Leadership in Early Childhood Systems"

There is an old saying, "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu." This adage captures uncomfortable truths in early childhood systems building, namely the absence of sufficient leadership of color in state systems work, growing racial/ethnic diversity in child and family populations, and growing inequality related to race, place, and social class. While early childhood systems professionals may insist that diversity is a value, we have few state or federal examples of intentional efforts to support current leadership and/or develop leadership pipelines. How do we support, strengthen, and grow leadership of color in early childhood systems to better serve children, families, and communities? What are the opportunities and challenges we face? A panel of national experts will discuss the challenges to, benefits of, and opportunities for the development of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse leadership in early childhood systems. Leadership norms are socially constructed, tied to identity and experiences, and shape the content, topic, and nuances on which people lead. Yet leadership is often assumed to be identity-neutral. In the field of early care and education, where close to half of the direct service workforce are women of color, where are their identities, experiences, and social norms represented at tables of power? In what ways are the perspectives of teachers and leaders of color in the field obscured by their minority status? How can leaders of color in ECE, who represent just a fraction of the field's leadership, foreground these voices in efforts to support workforce development? What are the opportunities, and why is it necessary to advance common and distinct goals among different racial and ethnic groups?

Speakers: Lea J.E. Austin, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment UC-Berkeley; Cemeré James, National Black Child Development Institute; Aisha Ray, BUILD Initiative[3]

This paper is a follow-up to the 2018 session. The goal of this paper is quite simple: to provide another venue for field leaders to discuss the gatekeeping that has made it difficult for policy leaders of color to get to and be heard at policy tables, along with their suggestions of how those policy tables can be more racially and ethnically diverse and inclusive. This is not a research paper in the traditional sense, and it does not synthesize the growing body of research and evidence on racial equity in the policy workforce.

In a reading of many reports and articles, two reports stood out for the focus on policy advocacy leaders. The report by PolicyLink *Leadership for Policy Change: Strengthening Communities of Color Through Leadership Development,*[4] written in 2003, includes interviews of 111 community-based non-profit leaders, elected officials, researchers, business and philanthropic leaders across the country. That report summarizes well the challenges and opportunities of diverse policy leadership.

While the need for increased participation of leaders of color in the policymaking process is clear, the path to achieving it is not. People of color who wish to take on broader, more mainstream leadership responsibilities face an array of obstacles including lack of access to professional development, limited funding resources, cultural differences, racism, and isolation from power. Often

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[3]Retrieved at https://qrisnetwork.org/sites/default/files/program-agenda/2018-07-10%2014%3A10/QRIS%20Meeting%20Program%202018%20FINAL.pdf A Youtube video of the sessions is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Kbao4d_RuI

[4]Marsh, D.W., Daniel, M.H., and Putnam, K. Leadership for Policy Change: Strengthening Community of Color Through Leadership Development. PolicyLink. (2003).

missing, too, are strong, supportive organizations to back these leaders and the means to build politically viable constituencies.

The result has been a dearth of leaders who can find access to policy tables and effectively influence what happens there. The limited number of leaders of color who have managed to gain access report feeling isolated and overworked as they try to fulfill policymaking roles in as many venues as possible. If they are unavailable, they fear, the voices of low-income communities of color will be unheard in the policy discussion. This has dangerous implications not only for communities of color, but for all sectors of a civil society.

Looking specifically at women of color in nonprofit organizations, the Building Movement Project's initiative published in early 2019 a report, *Race to Lead: Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector*,[5] that is particularly resonant in an advocacy field that is predominantly female. The report highlights three key findings: "1. Racial and Gender Biases Create Barriers to Advancement for Women of Color, 2. Education and Training Do Not Provide Equity, and 3. The Social Landscape of Organizations is Fraught for Women of Color."

Both the findings and the strategies in these papers, in particular, were mirrored in the interviews, and this paper's recommendations follow the outline of the report, *Race to Lead*, at three levels: individual, organizational, and systems.

Author reflections

I have gone back time and time again to thinking about my role as a white woman at policy tables. From the readings and in these interviews, I recognize the white privilege of doing this paper and that future papers need at a minimum a partner who is a person of color. The experience has been humbling in a very positive way, and I hope that it helps inspire to learn, reflect, and act in different ways to promote policy tables that welcome and support advocates of color and adopt a racial equity approach to the advocacy so that the shared goals of child, family, and community well-being are achieved in part through high-quality, affordable, accessible, and culturally responsive early childhood programs and systems.

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[5]Biu, O. 2019. Race to Lead: Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector. Building Movement Project.

Methodology

Two terms are used in this paper: "early childhood education" and "policy leader." The first encompasses birth-to-five programs, such as Head Start and Early Head Start, child care, state prekindergarten, early intervention, and preschool special education. The second refers to those individuals who on a full-time basis are involved in policy development and/or implementation and policy advocacy.

This paper centers on the phone interviews of eight established early childhood education policy leaders of color. They have and are working in a variety of policy settings: nonprofit organizations, government, and higher education institutions. Some of the interviewees have worked in multiple settings. During the phone interviews, each policy leader discussed how she came to work on early childhood education policy, the different forms of gatekeeping from entry to the work through leadership development, and ways to move from gatekeeping at the individual, organizational, and structural levels.

- **Lea Austin,** PhD, Executive Director, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California at Berkeley

- **Miriam Calderon,** MSW, Early Learning System Director, Early Learning Division, Oregon Department of Education

- **Cemeré James,** Vice President of Policy, National Black Child Development Institute

- **Myra Jones-Taylor,** PhD, Chief Policy Office, ZERO TO THREE

- **Beatriz Otero,** Senior Advisor, Marc Elrich, County Executive, Montgomery County, Maryland

- **Cristina Pacione-Zayas,** PhD, Associate Vice President of Policy, Erikson Institute

- **Sherri Killins Stewart,** EdD, Director of State Systems Alignment and Integration, BUILD Initiative

- **Choua Vue,** Vice President of Community Impact, Illinois Action for Children

In addition, extensive readings on the lack of and how to promote diversity in policy positions and a variety of tools for organizations to address racial equity were reviewed. This report provides a selection of these resources.

Gatekeeping

Racial Equity Lens

A new generation is coming of age during a period of rising interest and activity on social justice and racial equity. Young people of color are joining and at the forefront of movements like Black Lives Matter and ending the school-to-prison pipeline. How can we recognize current early childhood education policy leaders and attract more people of color to this work?

In early childhood education, the interviewed leaders feel that the policy leaders are neglecting an honest dialogue and organizational approach to white supremacy. One said that early childhood advocates need to stop playing it "safe" and that if not confronted directly, then the status quo continues. Another pointed out how narrowly early childhood education advocates work on racial and social justice. For example, in the early campaign to enact federal family and medical leave or raise the minimum wage, few early childhood organizations took an active advocacy role when they should have been at the forefront.

Most early childhood policy work focuses on funding streams and standards for the delivery of early childhood education services and for the workforce. High-quality, affordable, accessible early childhood education is important, but it is a buffer to poverty and does not address its root causes. One of the interviewees put it very directly: "We sugarcoat the work and don't explicitly dig into the issues of racial equity in early childhood education. The early childhood advocates as a whole have built up political capital by using brain science, return-on-investment, and school readiness to advance their policies instead of racial and ethnic equity."

Some of the interviewed policy leaders connected the lack of interest of emerging advocates of color to early childhood policy to organizations' lack of an explicit, embedded racial equity approach. Do the organizations and their policy advocates examine their privileges, implicit biases, and white supremacy? How are they addressing systemic and institutional racism in public policy? Are the white leaders raising issues of racial equity within their own organizations? As one interviewee noted, it is not unusual for the person of color in the organization to be asked to teach or lead a workshop on racial diversity, inclusion, and equity even though they are not trained to be, nor do they wish to be, the organization's diversity officer.

Philanthropy has a significant role in helping organizations look inward and then ground their work in racial equity. One policy leader remarked that funders had perpetuated inequities and institutional racism for decades by focusing grants on organizations with little to no diversity in their leadership and whose work lacked a racial equity approach. More recently, many foundations have looked at the diversity of their leadership and how their grants promote policies that will explicitly address racial and ethnic inequities. As one leader noted, the grantmakers' internal work on racial equity allows them to provide organizations with trainers and tools to assist childhood education organizations to examine and create sustained institutional diversity and equity agendas.

Pathways to public policy roles

How does someone learn about and prepare for full-time, paid policy positions in government, professional associations, policy advocacy think tanks, and other entities that are advancing federal, state, and local public policies? Outside of college degree programs focused on public policy, there may be few instances to learn about policy and advocacy roles. Among early childhood education practitioners, the introduction to policy and advocacy may be grassroots advocacy alongside pedagogy and early childhood program administration.

The interviewed leaders noted the lack of exposure to policy careers in general. They urged the development of clear, accessible pathways to policy and advocacy positions through systems work such as state early childhood career lattices and creating more connections to networks, internships, and fellowships with intentionality on the need to attract and support people of color to early childhood education policy work.

State professional development pathways

Every state has an early childhood education professional development pathway, sometimes known as the career lattice. Federal and state policies have encouraged them and helped fund their development. The Institute of Medicine and National

Research Council report, *Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce,* recommended that states "Develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines at the individual, institutional, and policy levels for transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8." For the most part, these pathways include teaching positions, program directors or administrators, coaching, and sometimes faculty in higher education. Few state career pathways mention public policy roles in early education, and then the onus is on the individual to know what those job titles mean and how to prepare for them. As one leader noted, in order to include these in a career pathway there would need to be a clear understanding of the job role, work setting, and preparation expected.

Expanding state early childhood career pathways to include public policy roles requires the policymakers, data collectors, and implementers of early childhood professional development systems to make changes. It also requires a deep examination of structural racism and implicit bias to ensure that these are open-gate pathways for people of color.

Creating a transition from pedagogy and program management to policy roles

All of the interviewed said that much more needs to be done to build our next generation of early childhood policy leaders from the people, especially the people of color, who now are working in early childhood classrooms and programs. This will require special supports and considerations. One advocate noted that in general, not just in early childhood education, white women are allowed to and have support in transitioning from one role or from one profession to another, and that the same needs to be afforded to women of color.

With the high turnover rates within programs and from early childhood to other parts of the early childhood system or outside of it, it is not surprising that some of the interviewees noted gatekeeping by the early childhood programs themselves.

Losing a teacher to a policy position strains programs not only in terms of services, but also the professional development investment in teaching for someone now leaving the classroom. In seeking policies that require paid time for professional development to improve pedagogy, the field has not elevated paid professional development and field experience time in public policy.

Three examples of early childhood policy pathways were raised for consideration. One is Head Start. The Head Start workforce has more exposure to policy positions by virtue of a close relationship to the federal regional offices, the state Head Start Collaboration office, and the federal Office of Head Start. The former federal Head Start Fellows Program provided the Head Start workforce with a yearlong, paid fellowship in the federal office to work on policy. Fellows can be working in local Head Start or other early childhood development programs, and when accepted, are placed for a year in the national and regional Head Start offices, higher education institutions, and public and private organizations serving children and families. The revised Head Start Program Performance Standards, however, no longer allow placements "in any agency whose primary purpose, or one of whose major purposes is to influence federal, state or local legislation."[6] Although Fellows are to return to Head Start programs, many went on to full-time policy positions, including directing the federal Office of Head Start.

Another advocate raised Teach for America as a model. Teach for America is best known for recruiting soon-to-be and recent graduates of colleges and universities to teach in (primarily) public schools, including prekindergarten classrooms. Many of their alumni do not remain in the classroom, which can be seen by some as a flaw of the program, but many remain in education on the policy side instead of direct teaching. On the section of its website recruiting future Teach for America participants, the organization highlights the pathway that can contribute to equity in high-quality teaching outside of the classroom: "as an alum, you will have lifelong support to continue expanding opportunities for kids, whether you choose to stay in the classroom or make an impact on education in

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[6]Head Start Program Performance Standards, Part 1304, Subpart E.

another career field".[7] As it grew, Teach for America created another linked organization, Leadership for Educational Equity. Alumni of Teach for America are supported as movement building advocates and as policymakers, including support in helping them become elected policymakers.[8]

A third example is a recently developed state program to build the pipeline of early childhood policy experts. As part of its successful grant application for the federal Preschool Development Grant B-5 grant, the State of Oregon is creating "statewide fellowship for early learning professionals, providing program level leaders the opportunity to work at the systems level. The program will place a cohort of local leaders in a one-year fellowship at one of the five agencies that are part of the ELC [Early Learning Council] . . . Fellows will be selected by the 33 ELC in a process that prioritizes diverse professionals from rural communities, from Tribal communities, or who have worked with historically underserved populations." A curriculum is being developed and the fellowship is anticipated to begin in year two of the grant.[9]

Job applications criteria and competencies

The interviewees highlighted two concerns with diversifying who is working in public policy jobs: the recurrent phrase from white leaders that "I couldn't find any candidates of color" statements and the criteria that organizations specify in job announcements and applications that shut out people in the early childhood workforce from transitioning to policy jobs.

As discussed in the section on networks, in part this is a function of how people find out about and are referred to policy jobs through people working in public policy. There is also the implicit bias of wanting to work with people who look like themselves and have similar backgrounds. White policy leaders look for certain attributes when hiring that are defined by white leaders. Often white leaders may be critical of people of color, with an implicit bias that they are not good with data or writing or theory of change. Instead, they believe people of color are good with people and relationship building. They may also favor people who are more

aggressive, outward-focused personalities, and self-promoters. These implicit biases may not be always true, but the result is that those who are doing the hiring are likely to overlook people of color and the skills and other assets they bring to the advocacy work. Questioning that lens must happen at the earliest stages of the hiring process, not after the pool is set.

The criteria in job descriptions for policy positions tend to have similar elements: a focus on higher education degrees and prior policy experience (internship or paid work), requirements for skills in qualitative and quantitative research, experience in meeting with legislators, and examples of policy and advocacy writing. These criteria shut out people who have important skills that are used in other contexts but which are at their core skills for effective policy and advocacy work. This is particularly true for early childhood educators working directly with children and staff who want to shift to policy jobs. The skills they practice in classrooms, programs, and with families are competencies that are important to good policy. One advocate described the policy advocacy competencies are weighing choices, participatory decision-making, negotiating and compromising, looking at the cost-benefits, doing researching and finding information for their own professional development and continuous improvement, and human analysis as workplace skills that early childhood educators use all the time. In hiring and helping early childhood educators transition from practice to policy jobs, credit needs to be given to these transferable skills.

The field of early childhood educators is more racially and ethnically diverse than the policy workforce. By inviting and supporting early childhood educators to become facile with public policy processes, analysis, and advocacy strategies, policy tables would not only be more diverse but would also open up discussions and agendas to reflect the policy needs to close the disparities for children, families, and providers in on-the-ground experiences of the children, families, and early childhood providers in building high-quality, well-financed systems and cross-discipline advocacy.

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[7]Teach for America. Retrieved at https://www.teachforamerica.org/how-to-join/why-join-tfa

[8]Leadership for Education Equity. Retrieved at https://educationalequity.org/why-leadership

[9]Retrieved at https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Oregon-PDGB-5-renewal-Application-Proj_Desc-File.pdf

Higher education's role in building the pipeline of early childhood policy leaders

All the interviewed advocates had a higher education degree, and most had multiple postsecondary degrees. Job descriptions for public policy positions typically list minimum and preferred higher education degrees. This begs at least two questions: how can higher education institutions better prepare people for policy advocacy roles in early childhood education, and how can a desire or need for public policy experts and advocates to have a higher education not be a closed gateway for people of color who want to pursue those degrees?

It is well-established that higher education has many barriers,[10] especially for people of color and for low-income women. There are barriers related to academic preparation for college-level academic expectations, lack of familiarity with the process of selecting and applying to higher education programs, financial aid needs and gaps, and supports needed to succeed in and graduate from postsecondary programs, especially at the bachelor's level and higher. Most of the initiatives designed to address these barriers, such as the T.E.A.C.H Early Childhood scholarships and similar programs, focus on teacher preparation as essential to providing high-quality experiences for all young children. Degrees in early childhood policy, however, are few and difficult to sustain.

Lea Austin and Marcy Whitebook created an early childhood education leadership degree program at Mills College, a private institution of higher education in Oakland, California, to fill a gap in pathways to policy roles. Subject matter experts in policy and political dynamics led the coursework, and students were recruited from different parts of the early childhood education field, including teachers. Mentors and field experiences were required components of the degree program. Alameda California's First Five Commission and the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation funded the initiative, helping to cover faculty and staff salaries, financial aid, the field experiences, and mentorship. The soft money financing did not endure and the program was not self-sustaining. There is another program on early childhood leadership at Mills College today, but its purpose is not to grow the early childhood policy leadership pipeline. While philanthropic funding can be essential to starting up a policy-focused early childhood degree program, it alone cannot institutionalize a program in a higher education institution. Higher education institutions play an important role in the pathway and they need to create strategies for outreach and recruitment to racially and ethnically diverse students, financial and academic assistance to pursue an early childhood policy degree or specialization, growth of faculty or co-teaching to address early childhood development and public policy content, and relationships with policy employers inside and outside of government for field experience and job placement.

A collaboration to explore how institutions of higher education can prepare individuals for early childhood policy leadership roles is advancing under the leadership of Teachers College, Columbia University and the University of Missouri-Columbia with the input of faculty with expertise in early childhood policy and some policy leaders. They are addressing the requisite body of knowledge and skills, how to prepare diverse individuals to take on the roles of early childhood policy leadership with open access teaching materials, and how to promote adoption of these degree programs and/or certificates in colleges and universities. The effort is also exploring the development of early childhood policy as a domain of inquiry, one that can be infused into institutions of higher education throughout the country. The effort will also tackle discerning the competencies, skills, and delivery mechanisms associated with advancing early childhood policy in institutions of higher education. While inclusive of diverse organizations, the effort is focusing on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Setting, getting to, and being at the policy tables

Policy tables include the internal organizational mission and strategies for carrying out public policy and advocacy, the coalitions that convene advocates, and briefings, meetings and other direct en-

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[10]There are too many reports on the structural and social barriers to higher education for people of color to reference individually. Multiple reports on challenges and opportunities to expand access to and success in higher education degrees for early childhood teacher preparation are available from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, National T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Project, New America, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Institute for Women's Policy Research, and many others.

gagements with policymakers. Whether it is setting the table, access to the table, or the experience being at the table, the interviewed advocates stated that white advocates need to be better white allies by understanding their privilege and a deeper understanding of the interplay of historic, systemic racism and today's racism; to shift from thinking of diversity and inclusion to racial equity, and to be more closely connected to the communities and families for which they are working to create positive child development, family economic success, and a fair and just society through a focus on early childhood education.

Setting the tables

One advocate said that the starting place is not why is everyone at the tables so white, but questioning is this the right table, the table that we want? Who are the right people to have at the policy table? Why are all the white people at the policy table? White advocates are the majority, and they are getting to define the table and who should be included. This is itself is a function of white supremacy and needs to be treated as a compelling problem and elevated as a concern on the individual and organization levels. How much are the white women at the policy tables talking about their own privilege? White women advocates need to examine how and why they are gatekeepers and examine their own biases. Working in government is similar to working in a primarily white organization; even in a governmental body that is increasingly racially and ethnically diverse in its makeup, the agendas and approach lack a racial equity lens.

Getting to the table

Several of the interviewed advocates noted that some advocates are always at the meeting, or leading the meeting, while others are treated more like "guests" at these tables. This is especially true when the organization is focused on an identity population, such as African-American families or immigrant families. One advocate stated that in the same city and state, when she worked for an identity-focused organization she was less likely to be asked to participate in the coalition tables and when she was there, often was assumed to be representing only a narrow focus within early childhood education.

The categorization is not self-imposed. In coalitions, the head of the coalition dispenses what he or she thinks each organization should focus on for the coalition—their "lane." Two problems arise: the population specific groups and diminished in their ability to support the whole agenda, and they are being told by primarily white advocates in primarily white organizations where their work starts and stops. This, she noted, is a way in which white supremacy is being operationalized.

When organizations or advocates of color do not get to the tables, it diminishes the advocacy in at least two ways. First, there is less diversity of experience and knowledge in the policy conversations. Second, those organizations and advocates have less exposure, thus their professional networks are smaller. While several of the interviewees noted that it may be natural human behavior to categorize people and to associate with those most like oneself, it is impacting the success of the advocacy efforts.

At the tables

After getting to the table, being at the table also is fraught with issues for advocates of color and raises questions about the policy choices and strategies that are made at those tables.

When asked to discuss their experiences at policy tables, four areas were highlighted by all of those interviewed that sustain white privilege: the absence of the authentic voices of the people for whom the policies are intended to benefit; the burden of having race and immigrant issues being raised only by the advocates of color; how white privilege shapes what is discussed and by whom; and the experience of microaggressions.

Unlike community organizers, many early childhood advocates do not have a lot of deep contacts with the communities and families that are intended to benefit from the policies. There is a palpable difference in how organizers and traditional policy advocates approach identification of a policy problem. If asked, the families would identify other barriers as priorities for policy solutions. Advocate's agendas can be pushing policies that are disruptive not because of bad intent but because the white advocates always thought of it that way. With fewer connections to people of color, they may not focus on examining how racial and ethnic inequities play out in the lives of beneficiaries. One of the inter-

viewed advocates noted how much more authentic and stronger the policy advocacy can be when policy organizations hire a combination of community organizers and policy advocates to collaborate on policy.

Using an organizer's approach and a racial equity lens would change the approach to identifying the most pressing needs for children and families and would change the approach to advocacy strategies. One advocate told how she now asks for a racial equity analysis at every meeting, until it becomes embedded in all the analysis and discussions. Communities of color and immigrant families would be discussed from the perspective of the positive aspects they bring, not starting with a perspective of deficits. The advocates focus on poverty and low-income, but these can be code words for race and ethnicity. In addition, not all people of color and immigrants are poor or economically struggling.

By intentionally using a racial equity lens, the advocacy would be intersectional. The issues would be addressed from a perspective or engagement with community voices that will be most impacted by those policy decisions, such as African-American, Latinx, immigrants, refugees, other people of color, disabilities, and LGBTQ. Intersectional advocacy also means that early childhood advocates would be expected to be at policy tables promoting equitable housing, health, mental health, transportation and community development tables, among others.

All the interviewed advocates raised that they felt it was an ongoing expectation that the advocates of color would raise race and immigrant issues. They are pigeon-holed into representing only families and communities of color or immigrants. For instance, it's common for people at these tables to talk about Latinx as if they are all immigrants. These tables need clarity in the conversations about Latinx, Africans, other groups instead of large categories of people or broad generalizations without an understanding of complexity.

In addition, there is also the burden of being asked to explain and teach racial equity as if they are the diversity officers. As one noted, she does not have expertise in diversity training, she has expertise in early childhood policy. Whether it is one or many advocates of color at the table, the white ad-

vocates should not be relieved of explicitly raising issues related to race and ethnicity.

Several advocates pointed out that they and others constantly feel as if they must prove their expertise. The person who is seen as the policy leader or expert is rarely challenged, a deterrent for people to take risks in raising other ideas or concerns. There are microaggressions, such as other advocates rolling their eyes when raising concerns of immigrant families and dual language learners. When a person of color raises an issue that a white policy leader was not ready for the group to discuss, it gets placed on a side agenda and it may never get raised again. Alternatively, there is pressure at the table that there is insufficient time to discuss these issues, another function of white supremacy. Policy leaders of color may feel that they have only so many "chits" for raising racial equity. The discomfort at raising issues and using language that the majority uses at the table is limiting good policy ideas and means that the selected policy agendas and objectives are not well-matched to the communities and families of color intended to benefit from those policies.

Networks, mentors, and leadership development

Networks

Every advocate interviewed for this paper talked about the importance of networks. In public policy jobs, not just in early childhood, a person learns about other jobs, projects, or funding opportunities through their networks. Established early childhood policy leaders have extensive networks—advocates, researchers, faculty, and policymakers.

Gaining access to and then being promoted within these networks requires mentors and supervisors to actively promote people of color. One said that her mentor and supervisor, a white woman, would "step aside" so that she could be the face of the organization at policy tables. For her, having this mentor constantly look for opportunities to make her more visible and to give her more leadership opportunities was very important to her career. Often people of color lack that kind of mentorship where the person is making sure they are at tables and making them ready for the next leadership role.

Mentors

Mentors can be very important to an advocate of color's career trajectory. From helping them become visible and get to the policy tables in their stead, to promoting them as project leaders, mentors can have a significant impact on a person's career and status. Both advocates who had good mentor experiences had white women mentors. Both said that having a mentor who truly embraced racial equity and made a concerted effort to promote them as policy leader did not require the mentor to be a person of color. What matters in good mentorship is helping someone understand and navigate a complex policy field, be generous with their connections, refer a person of color to commissions and task forces instead of themselves, even refer them to positions in other organizations that will advance your career—in other words, gate openers who are also keenly aware of the need and the value of diversifying the policy tables.

Gatekeeping can happen in informal mentorships when people mentor those who share similar qualities, including race and ethnicity. Although not intentional, it is a form of gatekeeping. When there are so few people of color in these leadership roles, we must think of how white policy leaders can be more intentional on mentoring and employing people of color. This extends to a willingness to give up one's seat at a table to open it to a person of color, including stepping down from leadership. Especially when there are few leadership positions that do not turn over very often.

Leadership development

Several of the interviewed advocates called for more fellowships, particularly at midcareer, that support leadership growth. One of the policy leaders participated in two fellowships that included herself and another early childhood leader in a cohort consisting primarily of K-12 education leaders, the Pahara-Aspen Institute Education Fellowship[11] and the Aspen Institute Ascend Fellowship.[12] Both were a "gift," providing a safe space to be challenged and to challenge others and that the fellowship actively championed the fellows. Both have become more diverse in their selection of participants over time. Fellowships specific to development of early childhood policy leaders are growing.

Some of these are:

- Barbara Bowman Leadership Fellows. A fellowship program of the Erikson Institute in Illinois, is "is designed to enrich the perspective and enhance the capacity of diverse child advocates who are committed to advancing racial equity through early childhood policy."[13] Participants work as directors of early childhood education centers, administrators of school districts, and social services professionals. The program consists of speakers, seminars, professional coaching, networking with former fellows and senior professionals, funders and senior executives at other organizations, and applied learning.

- Early Learning Action Network.[14] A program of the BUILD Initiative, ELAN has recently completed its first two-year cohort of fellows. The fellowship focuses on policy leaders tackling early childhood education systems from a racial equity lens, using a four-level frame of personal, interpersonal, structural, and organizational (which includes the first three). Participants have an applied learning project connected to their current work and learn in groups based on their interests. They engage with community voices and use them as a feedback loop. A second cohort is under consideration.

- The National Black Child Development Institute inaugurated the National Black Child Development Institute Policy Fellowship in 2019. The purpose of the fellowship is to will elevate and accelerate Black leaders to ensure leadership at the national level more closely reflects young children that are being served in education and other systems. Throughout this two-year program, NBCDI Policy Fellows will incubate new approaches to policies and reform systems to help Black children realize their full potential and brilliance. The first cohort includes individ-

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[11]Retrieved at https://pahara.org/our-work/pahara-aspen-education-fellowship/program-details/

[12]Retrieved at https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/our-strategies/leadership/?_ga=2.5095035.996922837.1581341634-1597674373.1581341634

[13]Retrieved at https://www.erikson.edu/policy-initiatives/early-childhood-leadership-academy/barbara-bowman-leadership-fellows/

[14]Retrieved at https://www.buildinitiative.org/Our-Work/Learning-Community/Projects-Activities

uals working in public service, policy, and early childhood education and research in the District of Columbia. (Massachusetts, Alabama, Illinois, Florida and Georgia.[15]

- State of Oregon. In its successful Preschool Development B-5 grant, the State of Oregon is establishing a cross-sector leadership fellowship for early learning professionals, providing program level leaders the opportunity to work at the systems level.[16] The program will place a cohort of local leaders, prioritizing diverse professionals from rural and Tribal communities or who have worked with historically underserved populations, in a one-year fellowship at one of the five agencies. The funds will be used in part to backfill fellows' positions as well as the learning sessions. State employees will be able to participate in the learning sessions to build a shared understanding of and the ability to take on the state-level leadership roles needed to develop and implement an early care and education system.

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[15]Retrieved at https://www.nbcdi.org/news/national-black-child-development-institute-nbcdi-today-announced-its-2019-class-nbcdi-policy

[16]Retrieved at https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Oregon-PDGB-5-Renewal-Application-Proj-Desc-File.pdf

Considerations for moving forward

There are many ways that individual and organizations can consider the "gatekeeping" and have inclusive diversity at the policy tables. Advocates need to consider the structural policy changes needed to create pathways that will attract, support and respect emerging advocates of diverse races and ethnicities. Here are a few for consideration.

Individual level

White advocates need to become better white allies of their peer advocates and of the children, families and communities that are the heart of their policy work. Allyship is a lifelong practice and not an identity that can be achieved in one approach. By reflecting on their privilege and white supremacy generally and their own implicit biases, white advocates will take a first and important step to creating inclusive tables and adopting a racial equity lens.

To be able to work from a position of racial equity, it is important to have ongoing connections to immigrant and racial minority communities and families and to invite them to help shape and engage in the policy advocacy work.

At the policy tables, white policy leaders need to ensure that they are raising issues of racial equity and not relying on policy leaders of color to raise racial and ethnic equity issues, that they are not dominating the discussions, and that they are inviting authentic voices from the communities that are the focus of the policy proposals, Policy leaders need to be good partners and mentors by ensuring they are promoting the visibility and professional progress of emerging and experience policy leaders of color at presentations, briefings, testimony, and in projects and not looking only for that moment of diversity on a panel or in a meeting.

Organizational level

Organizations, whether a government department or entities outside of government, need to learn about, embrace and embed racial equity as a starting point and goal. This work requires consistency and dedication over time, in some cases over a period of years.

Organizations should review job descriptions and hiring practices, policies and practices for a workplace culture of inclusion and belonging and set specific goals to diversify staff teams and compensate people of color who offer expertise.

Staying in the tight lane of early childhood programs and funding streams is not sufficient. Early childhood policy agendas will focus on these programs and funding streams, but the policy work should expand to partner across the policy tables working intersectionally to create positive structures and conditions for all children, families and communities.

Philanthropies need to provide multi-year funding and share their trainings, facilitators and resources in organizational racial equity.

Funders, whether philanthropies or government, need to consider how their funds are furthering organizations with racially and ethnically diverse leadership and policy efforts that are grounded in achieving racial and ethnic equitable outcomes.

Systems level

States should review their early childhood career pathways and include policy roles in early education, with explanations of and resources about the variety of policy positions and how to transition from teaching, directing, and coaching to those policy roles.

Data collection and program evaluation should provide information on racial and ethnic and set goals to eliminate inequities in services and systems.

Institutions of higher education should consider creating early childhood education policy degree programs, a specialization or track within other early childhood teaching and related degrees, and professional certificate programs. As these programs and certificates expand across the county, there must be attention to ensuring the racial and ethnic diversity of faculty as well as the students who enroll.

Postsecondary curricula (including fieldwork) should include explicit teaching of institutional racism. The design of the curriculum and fieldwork and the faculty teaching such courses also needs to be racially and ethnically diverse.

Programs that provide financial aid, mentoring and other supports to enable access to and affordability of postsecondary education should also be available to people moving from early childhood practice to policy.

Philanthropies should help establish paid fellowships for early career policy advocates and for those working now in early childhood education settings to take time away from their positions to develop expertise in policy, leadership, and networks.

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Biographical information of interviewed leaders

Lea Austin

Dr. Lea Austin is the Executive Director of the Center for Child Care Employment at the University of California at Berkeley.

Dr. Austin has more than a decade of experience in the early childhood workforce and professional development public policies. She plays a leadership role in the research and policy work of CSCCE, with an interest in the status accorded educators, including inequitable compensation and working conditions, racial wage gaps and stratification within the field, workforce data, and educational and professional pathways in early childhood education. Established in 1999, the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) is focused on achieving comprehensive public investments that enable the early childhood workforce to deliver high-quality care and education for all children through research, policy analysis, and direct work with policymakers on implementing sound early care and education workforce policy.

Dr. Austin's interest in securing access and opportunities for early educators to leadership and decision-making roles in the field were spurred by her work with Mills College and First 5 Alameda County (California), where she developed leadership programs in higher education and community settings and implemented a professional development initiative focused on attainment of college education. For Mills College, she developed with Dr. Marcy Whitebook leadership programs in higher education and community colleges and a professional development initiative focused on attainment of college education.

Prior to her work in early childhood education, Dr. Austin worked in a city compact on affordable housing services with mothers following the enactment of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Part of her work involved helping mothers enroll their children in Alameda County's preschool program. She was also responsible for managing the professional development of child care providers, primarily family child care providers of color, in the early days of California's First 5 funds from the Master Tobacco Settlement.

Dr. Austin earned her Doctor of Education and a master's degree in Educational Leadership from Mills College, a master's degree in Public Administration from California State University, a master's degree in Public Administration from Cal State Hayward, and a Bachelor of Arts in sociology from the University of California-Berkeley.

Miriam Calderon

Miriam Calderon is the Early Learning System Director overseeing the Early Learning Division in Oregon.

Miriam Calderon began her career in early childhood policy in Oregon working as a mental health consultant in Head Start programs in Portland. She returned in 2017 to serve as Early Learning System Director for the State of Oregon. Formed in 2013, the Early Learning Division is responsible for directing learning initiatives and cross-system integration, policy, research, and equity. Programs include child care, home

visiting, Early Head Start and Head Start, Healthy Families Oregon, Oregon Pre-K, and Preschool Promise

Ms. Calderon has previous experience directing a state's early childhood system. She was the Director of Early Childhood Education at the District of Columbia Public Schools where she oversaw Head Start and prekindergarten programs, serving nearly 5,500 children in 84 public schools across the city.

Ms. Calderon has served as the Senior Director of Early Learning at the Bainum Family Foundation, where she shaped a new $10 million dollar investment in a birth-to-three system for the District of Columbia. She also was a senior fellow with the BUILD Initiative, leading BUILD's work related to advancing racial equity, supporting dual language learners, and maximizing federal initiatives, and was a faculty member for BUILD's Equity Leaders Action Network. She was a manager and consultant on Latino and Dual Language Learn Strategy for Teaching Strategies LLC.

During the Obama Administration, she was an advisor on early learning policy at the Domestic Policy Council of the White House and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Previously she was the Associate Director of Education Policy at the National Council of La Raza (now named UnidosUS) where she focused on early education for Hispanic and dual language children and advocated with Congress on child care, the reauthorization of the Head Start Act, and related programs and initiatives.

She has published several reports on early childhood education on dual language learners, immigrant children and families, and early childhood systems planning and implementation. Her work is cited in both English and Spanish media.

Ms. Calderon holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from the University of Delaware and a Master of Social Work degree from Portland State University.

Cemeré James

Ms. Cemeré James is Vice President of Policy for the National Black Child Development Institute.

Prior to her role at the National Black Child Development Institute, Ms. James was Deputy Director of Work Support Strategies and Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for Law and Social Policy where she led a multi-state initiative to design, test, and implement more effective, streamlined, and integrated approaches to delivering key supports for low-income working families, including health coverage, nutrition benefits, and child care subsidies.

Before coming to Washington, D.C., Ms. James served as Lead Operations Specialist at the Illinois Department of Human Services to improve delivery and access to food and medical assistance programs and helped redesign business processes in five human services offices serving more than 300,000 households. In that position, she also served as Affordable Care Act Business Process Lead to assist in identifying operations practices required to implement a new eligibility system, as part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and ensure that 85 human services offices were prepared for its implementation.

During her time in Illinois, Ms. James was a member of the Illinois Early Childhood Fellowship at the Illinois Action for Children, where she provided support to child care centers in implementing bilingual immersion curriculum, researched and presented on policy and legislation, and designed a leadership development program to increase leadership capacity and formal avenues for succession planning within the organization. She also served as a staff member of the Illinois Commission on the Elimination of Policy on its report. Ms. James also was part of the Illinois Children's Fellowship, now called the Barbara Bowman Fellowship, at the Erikson Institute.

Her professional work started as an engineer working for IBM in Washington, D.C. Ms. James earned her Master's in Public Policy at the University of Chicago, a Master of Science in Industrial Engineering and Management Science at Northwestern University, and her Bachelor of Science at Florida A&M.

Myra Jones-Taylor

Dr. Myra Jones-Taylor is the Chief Policy Officer at ZERO TO THREE.

Dr. Jones-Taylor leads the development and implementation of ZERO TO THREE's policy agenda, priorities, and strategies; oversees the Policy Center, which includes federal and state policy, advocacy, and federally funded technical assistance units; and serves as the principal spokesperson and point of contact for the organization on public policy matters with policymakers, the media, funders, and partner organizations.

Prior to her position at ZERO TO THREE, Dr. Jones-Taylor served as the founding Commissioner of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood.The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood was established in 2013 to coordinate and improve various early childhood programs and components in the state to create a cohesive, high-quality early childhood system. The cabinet-level state agency was responsible for early intervention programs, home visiting, early care and education, and child care licensing programs across the state, serving more than 50,000 children each year.

She served as an assistant professor-faculty fellow at the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research at the Silver School of Social Work at New York University. She is a cultural anthropologist with expertise in early care and education policy. Her research focused on the effects of early care and education reform on child care providers in low-income urban communities and the children and families who are intended to benefit from those reforms.

Dr. Jones-Taylor's dissertation focused on women and families 10 years after the passage of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families law. From her doctoral studies, she had planned to work on segregation and busing. She was recruited by the Governor's office to plan and develop the State of Connecticut's early childhood system.

Dr. Jones-Taylor is an active board member of organizations committed to young children and ending racial and social inequality, including All Our Kin, Capita, and Equity Partners. She is also a member of the Irving Harris Early Childhood and Reproductive Health Advi-

sory Committee. Dr. Jones-Taylor is currently a Pahara-Aspen Institute Fellow as well as an Aspen-Ascend Fellow. She is a former Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy Fellow and a recipient of the Ford Foundation Pre-Doctoral Fellowship.

She received her doctorate in American Studies, a master's degree in African American Studies, and her Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from Yale University.

Beatriz Otero

Ms. Beatriz "BB" Otero is Special Assistant to Montgomery County, Maryland, County Executive Marc Elrich.

Montgomery County is the most populous county in Maryland. In her role as Special Assistant, Ms. Otero provides advice and direction on health, human services, early childhood, and immigrant integration strategy.

As president of Otero Strategy Group, an innovative consulting practice integrating education, health, human services, and community development supports, with a focus on socially responsible policy and practice, she advises nonprofits, philanthropy, and local governments in strategic planning, policy development, and funding strategies.

Prior to leading Otero Strategy Group, Ms. Otero served as Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services for the District of Columbia. She oversaw 10 health and human service agencies and coordinated a comprehensive system of benefits, goods, and services across multiple agencies, including the Departments of Health, Behavioral Health, Health Care Finance, Disability Services, Disability Rights, Human Services, Child Welfare, Youth Rehabilitation Services, Aging, and Parks and Recreation agencies to ensure that children, youth, and adults, with and without disabilities, can lead healthy, meaningful, and productive lives.

Ms. Otero is the founder and CEO/President of CentroNía, a nationally recognized, community-based, nonprofit organization providing a range of bilingual educational and family support services to children, youth, and their families in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. CentroNía began as a small child care center housed in a church and grew into an award-winning educational and community development organization in the Washington Metropolitan region. CentroNía has received numerous recognitions and awards as a high-quality early childhood and community support organization and was selected by the Doris Duke Foundation as one of 21 exemplary early childhood programs in the nation. She also established a DC Bilingual Charter Elementary school.

Ms. Otero serves on numerous boards, including the Center for the Study of Social Policy, the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative, the Equal Rights Center and the Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness. She is a founding member of the DC Public Charter School Board.

Along with her many years of domestic policy work and local community service, Ms. Otero has a wide range of international experience

including disaster preparedness and humanitarian relief and advising local governments in Europe on immigrant conflict.

Ms. Otero holds a degree in education from the University of Maryland and has done advanced graduate work in education at George Washington University.

Cristina Pacione-Zayas

Cristina Pacione-Zayas, PhD, is Associate Vice President of Policy at the Erikson Institute.

Dr. Pacione-Zayas is charged with articulating and executing Erikson's policy agenda that generates systemic solutions to equitable opportunities and positive outcomes for young children, families, and communities.

Dr. Pacione-Zayas established Erikson's Policy Action Center that houses the Early Childhood Leadership Academy for Illinois leaders to enhance their capacity to advocate for policies that benefit young children and families. Within the Action Centers, she directs the Community Data Lab that seeks to democratize knowledge by curating timely and accessible child well-being data for local leaders to inform systems, and coordinates equitable resource allocation through the Early Development Instrument Project and Risk and Reach project. She works closely with Erikson faculty to translate research into policy.

Dr. Pacione-Zayas's work is informed by two decades of experience leading education policy and community education initiatives for Illinois Latinx communities. She led the Latino Policy Forum's Education Department with a focus on birth-to-third-grade continuum policy for positive outcomes for Latinx and immigrant children, using extensive experience implementing high-quality student-centered academic supports and initiatives to promote healthy, positive youth development in various Chicago communities. During her two years as the culture of calm coordinator for the Roberto Clemente Community Academy, a public high school, there was a significant reduction in serious disciplinary infractions. As community schools director at Enlace Chicago, she managed a network of eight community schools in the Little Village neighborhood, convening more than 50 partners for academic programming, arts and cultural enrichment, health and wellness, and adult education and family leadership development.

She serves as board secretary on the Illinois State Board of Education, as an Early Learning Council executive committee member, Illinois State Team member of the Build Initiative, and Title V Needs Assessment Advisory Committee member for the State's Maternal and Child Health Services. She also co-chairs The Puerto Rican Agenda of Chicago, a nonprofit of local Puerto Rican leaders who influence policy for the self-determination of Puerto Ricans.

Dr. Pacione-Zayas earned her doctorate in Educational Policy Studies, a Master of education degree in Educational Policy Studies, and dual Bachelor of arts degrees in Sociology and Spanish from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Sherri Killins Stewart

Sherri Killins Stewart, EdD, is the Director of State Systems Alignment and Integration for the BUILD Initiative and an independent consultant.

Dr. Stewart is known for crossing organizational boundaries to create a child development lens on the work of informal organizations as well as within other state agencies, including public health and housing. In her work with BUILD, she works directly with state leaders to advance early childhood systems efforts in health, early learning, and family support. She leads work to define and create intentional practices regarding equity in early childhood systems, policy, and leadership within the work of the BUILD Initiative. Her equity work includes co-leading a network of early childhood leaders to advance racial equity.

Her consulting clients have included BUILD, W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation, New Haven Public School System, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, and Pearson Publishing. She has worked at multiple levels and in a variety of states and/or communities to create targeted action to benefit young children and their families, including Georgia; Arkansas; Mississippi; Michigan; South Carolina; Virginia; New Jersey; New Haven, Connecticut; and Baltimore, Maryland.

Dr. Stewart was Commissioner of Early Education and Care for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, an agency that oversees early care and education, afterschool programming and licensing, and the quality rating and improvement system. She held several roles at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, with a final position as President for Human Development and Operations. Prior to her work with the foundation, she served as the founding President/CEO of the New Haven Empowerment Zone, was a mayoral candidate in New Haven, Connecticut, and led operations and programs for both the Empowerment Zone Corporation and the Family Preservation Initiative of Baltimore.

She has served on a variety of boards including the New Haven Housing Authority, New Haven Regional Workforce Board, and Connecticut Trails Girl Scouts, the MA Commission on Postpartum Depression, and the Boston Children's Museums Board of Advisors. Dr. Stewart holds a nursing degree from the University of Pittsburgh, a Master of Administrative Science from Johns Hopkins University, and a Doctorate in Counseling Psychology from the University of Sarasota.

Choua Vue

Ms. Vue is the Vice President of Community Impact at Illinois Action for Children.

In her role as Vice President of Community Impact at Illinois Action for Children, Ms. Vue is responsible for providing strategic leadership and direction for the agency's community systems programs. The Community Impact programs focus on improving families' access to early care and education services in local communities such as North Lawndale and throughout Cook County. The Community Impact team is also building the first statewide training and technical assistance program for early childhood collaborations in Illinois to support their systems change efforts locally.

Ms. Vue has extensive experience in policy, advocacy, and com-

munity organizing on child care and early childhood services. Prior to Illinois Action for Children, she advocated for policy changes on education and child welfare for Asian American and Pacific Islanders in New York City with the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF), the nation's only pan Asian children's rights organization, where she served as their Education and Child Welfare Policy Coordinator. Among her key education initiatives are the reduction of bias-based harassment in schools, the collection of disaggregated data on Asian Pacific American students, and the improvement of English Language Learner services. Among her key child welfare initiatives are the Preventive Services Action Network to improve the capacity and resources of community-based preventive services programs, as well as the South Asian Immigrant Community Partnership to build ties between the Administration for Children's Services and South Asian families.

She also serves as the Vice-President of the Board of Directors for the HANA Center, a community-based organization that "empowers Korean American, immigrant, and multi-ethnic communities through social services, education, culture, and community organizing to advance human rights," and she is a longtime mentor for the Young Women Warriors program through the Chinese Mutual Aid Association that mentors first-generation immigrant and refugee young women.

Previously, Ms. Vue was Program Director for the Outreach and Interpretation Project for the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. She also spearheaded electoral campaigns to increase political participation and awareness in immigrant and refugee communities and to protect voting rights.

Ms. Vue received her bachelor's degree from Carleton College and her Master's in Public Affairs from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs.