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FACTSHEET

Improving Opportunity in Tomorrow's Workforce

A business case for helping advance equity via early childhood investments

Workers of color are a significant and growing segment of the American workforce, representing more than one out of every three workers.[1] However, they carry a disproportionate share of economic challenges, from higher unemployment rates to lower average pay.[2] To strengthen our entire economy, it's vital that we make use of every available tool in our workforce-development toolbox to help remedy such inequities, starting with the inequities seen in early childhood: As data show, too many Black, Latino, and other children of color are entering kindergarten unprepared for school success, and at a rate outpacing their white classmates.[3]

Poverty is among the most corrosive conditions in kids' learning and development, and it affects disproportionally more children of color than their white counterparts.[4] Low socioeconomic status has a particularly detrimental effect on school readiness disparities among young children, with overall low-income/high-income gaps even wider than those separating white children from children of color.[5]

Often, these early challenges can extend to further struggles in school and beyond, in jobs and careers. And, yet, many children of color and from families with low incomes lack access to the high-quality early care and education (ECE) their parents seek[6]—and that is shown by research to boost opportunities for youngsters' success in the classroom today and the workplace tomorrow.[7] For example, studies indicate that high-quality preschool can nearly erase both Black-white and Latino-white gaps in reading skills at kindergarten entry.[8] And in math, early learning investments can reduce the school-entry learning gaps by 45 percent among Black children and 78 percent among Latino children. Further, high-quality preschool can shrink gaps between students from lower-income families and their wealthier counterparts (by 41 percent for reading and 27 percent for math).

Taking Next Steps in Policy

There are many promising options for improving equity through investments in ECE at the local, state, and federal levels. Among the several potential short- and long-term priorities are:

- **Increase access to high-quality, affordable ECE programs**, particularly for children of color and those from families with low incomes.
- **Prioritize the development and retention of a high-quality ECE workforce**, including boosting pay to attract and retain high-quality teachers, investing in professional development, and strengthening the teacher-training pipeline.

- **Bolster mental health supports for young children, their parents, and teachers** such as evidence-based solutions that reduce suspension and expulsion from ECE programs.[9]
- **Assist parents in their roles as kids' first and most important teachers** by investing in voluntary home-visiting programs.

Such supports can command positive results for children of color, the entrepreneurs and employees and community leaders of our future.



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