

Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education

National Association for the Education of Young Children

All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that help them achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, all early childhood educators have a professional obligation to advance equity. They can do this best when they are effectively supported by the early learning settings in which they work and when they and their wider communities embrace diversity and full inclusion as strengths, uphold fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities.

A graphic consisting of two concentric circles. The inner circle is a dark blue color and contains the hashtag "#EquityinECE" in white, bold, sans-serif font. The outer circle is a lighter, medium-blue color and is partially visible at the bottom left of the page.

#EquityinECE

Position

All children have the right to **equitable learning opportunities** that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society.

Advancing the right to equitable learning opportunities requires recognizing and dismantling the systems of bias that accord privilege to some and are unjust to others. Advancing the full inclusion of all individuals across all social identities will take sustained efforts far beyond those of early childhood educators alone. Early childhood educators, however, have a unique opportunity and obligation to advance equity. With the support of the early education system as a whole, they can create early learning environments that equitably distribute learning opportunities by helping **all** children experience responsive interactions that nurture their full range of social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and linguistic abilities; that reflect and model fundamental principles of fairness and justice; and that help them accomplish the goals of anti-bias education. Each child will

- › demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities;
- › express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring human connections across diverse backgrounds;
- › increasingly recognize and have language to describe unfairness (injustice) and understand that unfairness hurts;
- › have the will and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.¹

Early childhood education settings—including centers, family child care homes, and schools—are often among children’s first communities beyond their families. These settings offer important contexts for children’s learning. They should be environments in which children learn that they are valued by others, learn how to treat others with fairness and respect, and learn how to embrace human differences rather than ignore or fear them.

When early childhood educators use inclusive teaching approaches, they demonstrate that they respect diversity and value all children’s strengths. Early childhood educators can model humility and a willingness to learn by being accountable for any negative impacts of their own biases on their interactions with children and their families. They can work to ensure that all children have equitable access to the

learning environment, the materials, and the adult–child and child–child interactions that help children thrive. Early childhood educators can recognize and support each child’s unique strengths, seeking through personal and collective reflection to avoid biases—explicit or implicit—that may affect their decision making related to children.

To effectively advance equity and embrace diversity and full inclusion, early childhood educators need work settings that also embrace these goals—not only for the children and families served but also for the educators themselves. Early childhood educators should be well prepared in their professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach in diverse, inclusive settings. They also need to be supported by, and to advocate for, equity- and diversity-focused public policies. Each of these areas is addressed more fully in the recommendations below. Although the primary focus of this statement is on equitable learning opportunities for young children, we stress that such opportunities depend on equitable treatment of early childhood educators as well. We make these recommendations understanding the critical importance of building a recognized early childhood profession and a system with sufficient funding to ensure that all its members receive equitable compensation and professional recognition that reflect the importance of their work.

Recognizing that both institutional and interpersonal systems must change, our recommendations begin with a focus on individual reflection. Across all roles and settings, advancing equity requires a dedication to self-reflection, a willingness to respectfully listen to others’ perspectives without interruption or defensiveness, and a commitment to continuous learning to improve practice. Members of groups that have historically enjoyed advantages must be willing to recognize the often-unintended consequences of ignorance, action, and inaction and how they may contribute to perpetuating existing systems of privilege. It is also important to recognize the many reactions associated with marginalization that begin in early childhood and range from internalization to resistance.²

The following general recommendations apply to everyone involved in any aspect of early childhood education.