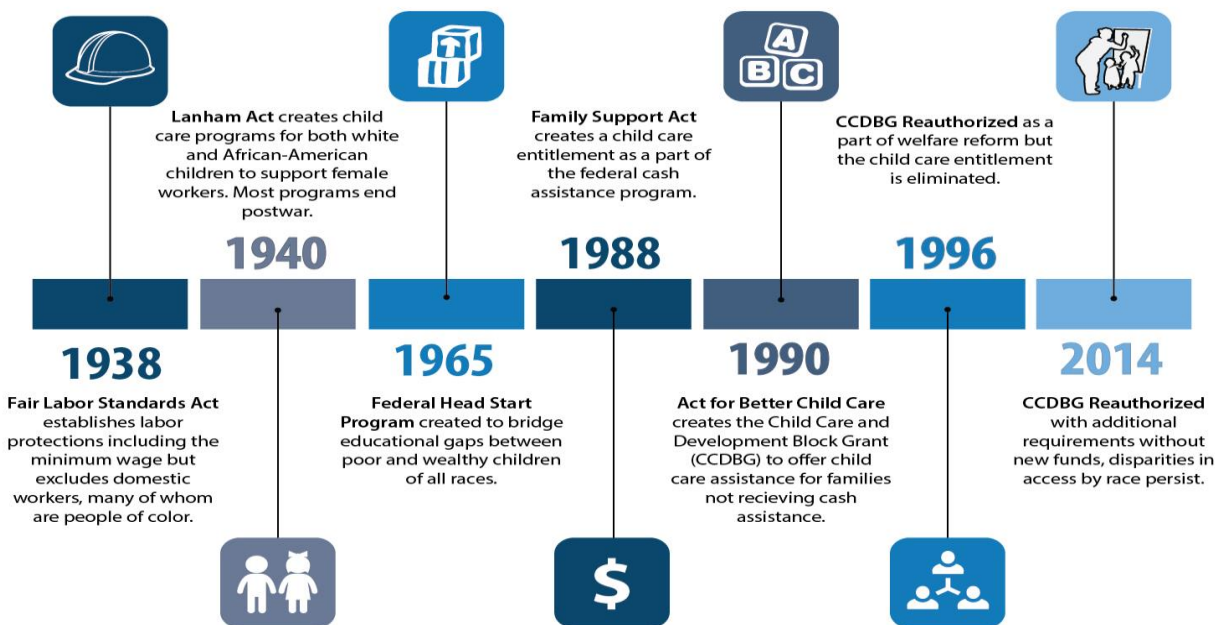


Equity Starts Early: Addressing Racial Inequities in Child Care and Early Education Policy

The Historic Role of Race in Shaping Early Education Policy

Historically, racial discrimination has shaped child care and the child care workforce. Black women and other women of color have historically borne the burden of domestic work and child care – first as slaves, then as an undervalued labor force.¹

Throughout the 20th century, the U.S. developed a series of public programs that provided child care assistance to some Americans. These programs and policies developed within a social and political context of racial bias. They relied on low-wage, low-skilled labor that often burdened women of color. This timeline shows the development of major federal child care policies and programs in the U.S.²More

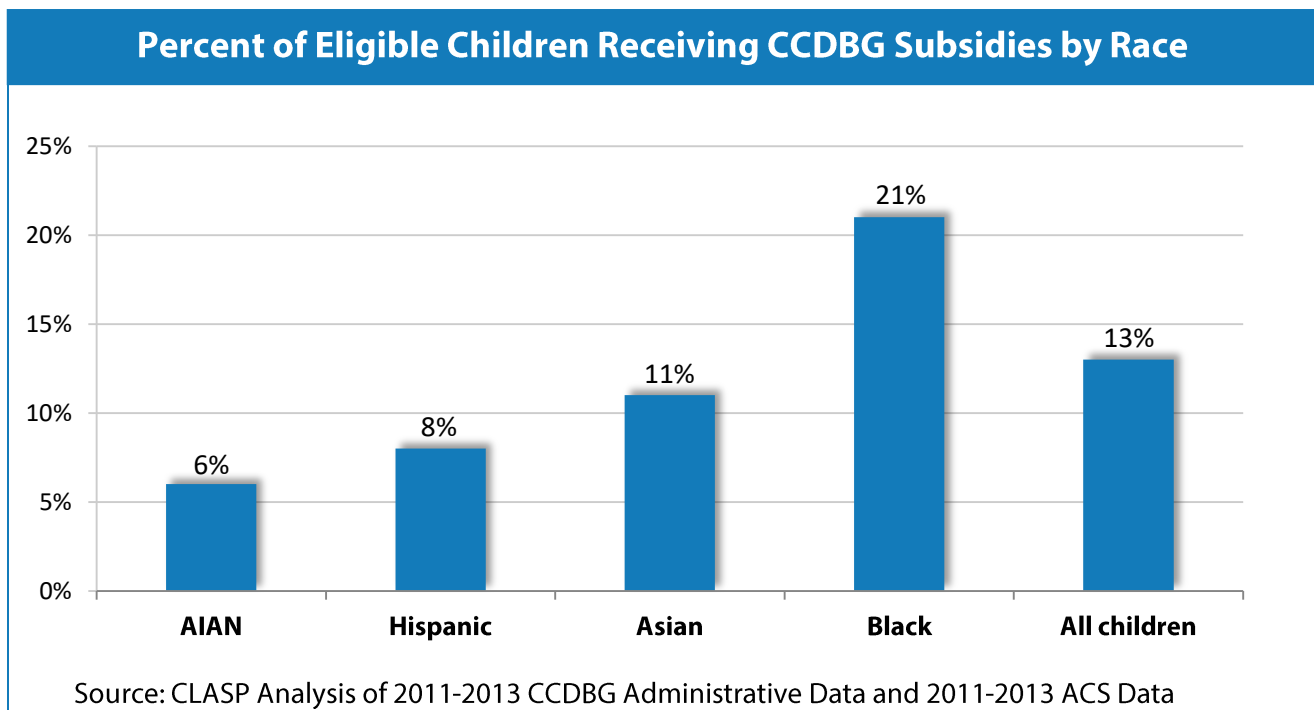


recently, in 2018 Congress passed and the President signed the largest-ever single year increase in federal funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) – an increase of \$2.4 billion. These new funds offer states an unprecedented opportunity to improve access, quality and equity for children and the workforce.

Disparate Access

Cost is the primary barrier to accessing formal child care and early education. On average, families living in poverty spend almost a third of their household income on child care and early education. That's due, in part, to the very low funding levels for assistance programs which intended to offset the high costs of child care. Only one in six children eligible for CCDBG child care subsidies actually get them. Just 43 percent of all eligible preschool-age children have access to Head Start.³ Young children in low-income families are disproportionately children of color.

Access to early childhood programs is inequitable. Certain populations face systemic barriers while navigating public programs, including immigrants, families that are low income, families with children who have disabilities, and linguistic minorities. According to CCDBG data from 2011 to 2013, fewer eligible Hispanic, American Indian and Alaskan native, and Asian children received CCDBG subsidies than the national average of 13 percent.⁴



Families with inconsistent work schedules often struggle to find formal child care. Low-wage work presents many obstacles, including unpredictable schedules, involuntary part-time hours, overtime with little or no notice, and lack of benefits like paid leave. These barriers disproportionately impact black and Latino workers, who are more likely to be employed in low-wage positions. Many low-income families can't use services provided by licensed child care and early education providers, because standard operating hours are incompatible with their work hours.⁵ As a result, they often rely on informal, license-exempt care.

Uneven Quality

Many under-resourced communities have limited availability of high-quality services. In a California poll, 40 percent of Latino parents reported no high-quality, affordable child care centers in their neighborhoods.⁶ In addition, state quality policies may not reflect or support community views on the characteristics of quality programs. State outreach about program availability and eligibility may not reach

all families. Finally, questions about immigration status may prevent eligible children, especially those from mixed-status families, from accessing care.

If early childhood services are available for families, they may not meet their diverse linguistic and cultural needs. Services for families that do not speak English proficiently are in particularly short supply.⁷ In this respect, Head Start is a model for other programs. Head Start is open to all otherwise eligible children regardless of immigration status. Moreover, its performance standards, community engagement, and planned language approach enable the program to effectively serve students from all backgrounds.

Racial stereotyping and bias create different experiences for children in early childhood programs. Black children, particularly black boys, are disproportionately disciplined in preschool programs. Although less than 20 percent of all public preschool students are black, they receive 42 percent of out-of-school suspensions from those programs.⁸ That has dire implications for these children's development and wellbeing. Many consider this the beginning of a preschool-to-prison pipeline.

An Undervalued Workforce

Women of color make up 40 percent of the early education workforce, but they're often relegated to the sector's lowest-paid positions.

The early childhood workforce continues to be undervalued and underpaid with few benefits, contributing to high turnover rates. In 2013, child care workers earned an average of \$10 an hour. Early educators of color are paid 84 cents for every dollar made by their white colleagues.⁹

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Children benefit from seeing racial diversity at all levels in their classroom. Children start to become aware of social categories like race during preschool. For children to form positive perceptions, they need early opportunities to interact with people from different backgrounds and to see people of color in leadership roles.¹⁰

Recommendations

We can only address racial inequities by applying a racial equity lens to all stages of policy development. That includes identifying needs, shaping policy strategies and solutions, and evaluating impact on people and communities of color.

- Developing racially equitable policies requires a **commitment to meaningful participation and leadership by individuals and communities of color.**
- Policies should be based on **disaggregated data** that reveal disparities in access and outcomes.
- **Evaluation data and effective community feedback loops** should provide information on how policies reach and impact diverse families and providers—as well as communities that don't receive enough resources—and how they address cultural and linguistic needs.
- **States and communities should review all child care and early education policies** to identify and address the root causes of racial equity in program eligibility, provider payment, workforce development, and quality-improvement systems and policies.
- **Federal and state policymakers should invest more resources** in child care and early education programs like Head Start and CCDBG. This would expand equitable access to high-quality child care and support a system of diverse, highly qualified providers and jobs with a fairly compensated workforce.

To read the full report, *Equity Starts Early*, please visit clasp.org.

Endnotes

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