

## **Invest in our children at birth to build racial equity**

Now is the time for radical change to ensure our children have a better world than the one they are witnessing today.

As we rebuild from this pandemic and global recession amid a reignited civil rights movement, we recognize that physical safety is only part of what's needed to open early childhood programs safely. It will take a significant public and private investment to erase the zip code disadvantage baked into our early childhood education system, when the burden of COVID-19 continues to weigh most heavily on communities already suffering from educational inequity.

We speak as the leaders of 14 mostly minority-led and -staffed community nonprofits serving tens of thousands of children and families across the City. As we resume in-person programming, continue distance learning, family support check-ins, and distribution of food and essential supplies, our high-quality early childhood programs will ensure Chicago's working families can return to their jobs and communities can thrive.

The children we support, their families, and our staff are the individuals now deemed "essential" to help keep the economy functioning during the pandemic. We insist that their well-being and potential also be declared essential.

Today, 83% of Chicago Public Schools students come from low-income households and only one in every four kids is ready for kindergarten across Illinois. While we work to bridge the opportunity gap, our efforts to promote equity are swamped by critical responses to COVID-19. We are adding remote engagement and family support, including mental health interventions, while facing decreasing enrollment and more absences.

COVID-19 is destabilizing our classrooms. Without stable funding, we can't fulfill our promise.

Our mission includes a commitment to family engagement and advocacy, which is linked to a child's future education and life success. That's why we're calling on our funding partners to draw on our experience as community representatives to inform allocation of the resources that can lead our children to a more equitable future.

Governor Pritzker and the Illinois legislature: thank you for appropriations to support early childhood education providers. You and other state leaders must continue to advocate at the state and federal levels for more resources, including relaxing the Childcare Assistance Program monthly attendance requirement from 79.5% to 50% due to COVID-19-related absences through June, 2021.

Mayor Lightfoot and DFSS: we're grateful for your continued funding. With increases through an allocation of the CARES ACT resources or other funds for early childhood education, we can more aggressively address inequities. Private sector supporters: please increase support for general operating needs to help us address the unexpected and unknown.

In the days and weeks ahead, we'll see more ways in which responding to systemic racism requires us to learn and unlearn how we live and work together as Chicagoans. We remain committed to that effort in partnership with public and private funders, and with an undying commitment to our families who trust us to advocate--now and as long as inequities exist.

**Early Childhood Education CEO Roundtable Current Members**

Asian Human Services · Carole Robertson Center for Learning · Centers for New Horizons · Chicago Child Care Society · Chicago Commons · Chinese American Service League · Christopher House · Concordia Place · El Valor · Erie Neighborhood House · Gads Hill Center Metropolitan Family Services · Onward Neighborhood House · YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago