



**Trust for
Learning**

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April 5, 2019

Katherine Kempe
Senior Director, Professional Recognition and Advancement
National Association for the Education of Young Children
1313 L Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20005
kkempe@naeyc.org

Re: NAEYC Position Statement on Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education

Dear Ms. Kempe:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Advancing Equity position statement released by NAEYC in February. Trust for Learning (the Trust) applauds the creation of such a thoughtful and comprehensive position statement on this critical topic and appreciates NAEYC's outreach to the field to ensure that *all* children receive high-quality early learning experiences.

The Trust shares your goal of helping to create equitable learning opportunities for a more diverse and inclusive generation of young children. Our work centers on advancing equity in early learning, by making sure that our most vulnerable children experience the highest quality approaches available—what we call Ideal Learning. Through the work of the Ideal Learning Roundtable, representatives of multiple early childhood approaches including Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Tools of the Mind, and more have come together to articulate a common vision for equity in decision-making, including:

- A guiding premise of work is that all children are not only entitled to an education that supports human flourishing, but that all children, regardless of class or culture, have within them the potential to realize that goal.
- Every child, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income has access to the educational resources that they need to thrive.
- Resources are targeted based on individual children's needs and circumstances, which includes providing differentiated funding and supports.
- All children and families are valued as contributing members of the community.



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- Administrators and teachers recognize the deeply disparate opportunities and outcomes that have existed and persist for children from low-income families, those of color, English learners, and children with disabilities.
- Teachers are knowledgeable about the community in which they teach and respect families' voice and agency to authentically inform decisions.
- Children's individual differences are celebrated as unique aspects of their identity.

We believe that these principles are well represented in NAEYC's position statement and appreciate the work that has been done to develop recommendations for early educators and administrators on how to operationalize equity in practice. In particular, we value the commitment to cultural responsiveness "as an ongoing process... [and] an enduring responsibility to learn and reflect based on direct experiences with children and others." We believe that all adults (e.g., teachers, staff, administrators) must engage in an ongoing cycle of continual improvement that comes with the immense responsibility of nurturing human development.

In addition, we suggest that the statement acknowledge to a greater degree that children's development takes place within the context of relationships. Education in the early years is dramatically social, and learning is constructed by adults and children together. It is within *this* paradigm that educators are called upon to establish a relationship with each child that appreciates their "unique strengths and supports the inclusion of all children—given differences in culture, family structure, language, racial identity, gender, abilities, and economic class." Ideal Learning requires that teachers must also foster a sense of community between and among the children and adults in the classroom that allows them to feel recognized and acknowledged. In order to create a caring, equitable community of engaged learners, we suggest that "teachers help children get to know and interact with each other, and provide ongoing support to them in developing intentional relationships."

Lastly, the Trust would like to offer one general piece of feedback in terms of the overall framing of the statement. While we believe that individual identity, power and privilege, and anti-bias work are indeed critical to supporting young children, we want to make sure the structural and historical drivers of current inequities are clearly acknowledged up front, rather placing too much emphasis on the idea that "Across all roles and settings, advancing equity begins with the individual."

We understand the intention here, but feel that it may unintentionally de-emphasize the historic policies and practices which created the inequities we now see among children and



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communities. Inequity in the context of US schools began with explicitly inequitable policies and norms like enslavement, displacement, and fully gender-segregated schools and opportunities. More recently, inequities have been exacerbated (often unintentionally) by policies regarding discipline and suspension, academic tracking, extracurricular opportunities, and special education designation. While the equity statement includes mention of some policy and system-level opportunities to advance equity as the document continues, we feel this structural and system-level lens is missing in the opening frame and conclusions of the document.

Thank you again for your leadership on this important issue. We look forward to continuing to work with NAEYC to guide the preparation and practice of those in our field and ensure that Ideal Learning is made real for every child.

Sincerely,

Chrisanne Gayl
Senior Director, Policy and Programs
Trust for Learning