Seeding Equitable Educator Development

Insights and impact from Trust for Learning’s nine SEED (Supporting Equitable Educator Development) fund partners
“Oftentimes a child’s destiny is written before entering the educational system due to inequitable systems and structural racism in our society. A child’s zip code should not determine their destiny in life. To address structural racism, the SEED grant offered an opportunity to positively influence mindsets, behaviors, and practices of early learning professionals who are entrusted with shaping the care and early learning of children, birth to five. High-quality, equity-centered professional development positions early learning professionals to dismantle systemic racism and provide ideal learning environments where children can thrive and reach their full potential.”

— Cynthia Jackson, Executive Director, Educare Learning Network and Senior Vice President, Start Early
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What are ideal learning environments for young children?

Principles of Ideal Learning Environments

The principles of ideal learning environments were created by early childhood experts who serve as members of the Ideal Learning Roundtable. This unifying framework draws from multiple pedagogical models and approaches, and takes into account the varied contexts within which early educators and care providers serve children and families from prenatal - age eight. Each principle aligns closely with developmental science, trauma-informed practice as well as research on racial, linguistic and cultural inclusion. For a summary of the research base behind these principles, please see Evidence Brief - Ideal Learning Environments for Young Children.
The first principle: racial equity

In 2015, a group of progressive educators gathered and began to articulate what are now the nine principles of ideal learning environments. They talked across pedagogical approaches about the importance of play in brain development, the centrality of real-time human relationships to learning, and the unique and powerful role of the educator in the learning environment. They also made explicit a commitment to racial, linguistic and cultural equity, which became the first, foundational, principle of ideal learning environments.

As Ideal Learning Roundtable members shared stories and tools from across early childhood approaches, they recognized another central principle of ideal learning environments, one that is particularly elusive in a state of chronic under-investment in the field — support for adult development. A growing body of scientific research suggests human beings’ lifelong capacity for growth, and the power of close, trusting relationships to facilitate that development. We have every reason to believe that investing in research-based, relational educator development programs which center racial equity and antiracism should have powerful results.

But racial equity is not one-time workshop work. How do we co-create practices and systems in which racial equity is both a lens and a daily habit? How do we support the development of early learning environments in which every child, family, and educator feels truly welcome? We know it is possible because we witness our partners building anti-racist practices and beautiful, inclusive learning environments serving children and families from prenatal - eight in diverse settings around the U.S. But the field is stretched impossibly thin and much more investment is needed.

We created the SEED fund in July 2020, only a few months into the pandemic. We hoped to fund effective anti-racist programs for educators, as well as the promotion of sustainable pathways in ideal learning approaches for educators of color and those facing socioeconomic challenges. Our nine SEED partners applied for, received, and successfully completed their grant projects despite the challenges of pandemic surges, educator shortages and burnout. Their individual and collective successes are remarkable, and their work will impact tens of thousands of educators per year moving forward.

This report is meant to encourage increased and sustained investment in similar efforts. We hope it will inspire conversation about how to better support educators as they develop and guide anti-racist, ideal learning environments for children and communities.

The Trust for Learning team
November, 2022
Background on the SEED fund

A preponderance of evidence suggests that devoted, highly-skilled early educators who reflect the communities they serve are essential to our nation’s families and our future. While educators have faced chronic under-investment for years, the field is now in crisis as educators either leave their positions or continue to teach under unrelenting stress.¹ Systemic inequities in educator development and compensation fail communities on multiple levels: children miss out on developmentally critical interactions with wonderful teachers, and educators miss out on growth and development in a profession they might otherwise have loved.²

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the essential role of early childhood educators in our society and economy. Simultaneously, racial justice advocates generated new political will and awareness about the importance of ensuring racial, linguistic and cultural equity in all aspects of child development programs. These conditions spurred momentum and innovation despite the enormous stress of an evolving economic, political, and public health landscape.

Within this context, Trust for Learning (the Trust) created 2020’s Supporting Equitable Educator Development (SEED) fund to catalyze investments that address these challenges and support a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable early learning workforce skilled in high-quality, anti-racist practice aligned with the principles of ideal learning environments. The initiative built on insights from the Trust’s 2020 Ideal Pathways report about the state of educator development programs aligned with ideal learning approaches, and sought to accelerate momentum at the intersection of racial equity and quality in the early childhood profession.

Fund goals and overall impact

With general support from the Trust’s core philanthropic partners, five partners made additional contributions to the SEED fund to support creative COVID-19-era projects led by early learning providers, training organizations, local government, and institutions of higher education to address one or more of the following objectives:

1. **reduce barriers to participation for low-income educators and educators of color** in high-quality models of educator development
2. **create on-ramps to degree and credential pathways** by strengthening articulation between educator development experiences and institutions of higher education
3. **integrate anti-bias/anti-racist (ABAR) training** into educator training curricula and materials

This final report provides a synopsis of the overall impact of the initiative and highlights the remarkable work of each of the nine partners as well as insights related to the fund’s goals. Trust for Learning welcomes additional conversation and feedback on this effort.
Overall impact

The SEED fund’s partners illustrate that a relatively small, targeted amount of pooled grant funding can support motivated organizations to catalyze systemic change and measurably advance racial equity. These one-year grants ranged from $25,000 to $50,000. In some cases, a SEED grant was the tipping point that enabled an organization to undertake significant transformation. In other cases, SEED funds supplemented larger grants to enable a more concentrated focus on ideal learning practices. These changes will have short- and long-term impacts on tens of thousands of early educators, especially in large training organizations like Educare, HighScope, the Louisiana Department of Education, and the Council for Professional Recognition. Some partners, like AVANCE, provided individual scholarships to educators and worked to build high-quality, credential-granting pathways. Others, like the Children’s Equity Project, revised an existing educator development program to impact thousands of educators per year.

The nine partners who participated in the SEED fund reached educators in multiple ways. Several projects focused on embedding anti-racism and/or the principles of ideal learning environments into educator development programs. Many offered direct scholarships or other support for individuals to participate in training opportunities and higher education as a complement to their programmatic work.

Individual-level impact:

- SEED funds directly supported more than 50 individual educators through scholarships at several points in the pipeline (high school, CDA, bachelors);
- SEED funds supported coaching and professional development for at least 100 educators;

Systemic impact:

- SEED funds supported content improvements focused on anti-bias/anti-racism to a nationwide educator preparation program (via the Council for Professional Recognition) which serves over 40,000 educators per year;
- SEED funds supported revisions to 4 large-scale educator development curricula (including Educare and HighScope) which will impact over 2,500 educators per year;
- SEED funds supported educators in 18 states during the grant period and will support educators in all states in the future due to substantive changes made to nationwide programs; and
- In one case, the SEED investment helped make high-quality educator development more affordable and accessible. HighScope’s transition to a virtual platform will save almost 50% per educator. This structural change will allow for greater accessibility for future educators.
SEED partners

1. AVANCE
   Texas

2. Avenue Scholars (Grow Your Own) & Educare Omaha
   Omaha, Nebraska

3. Bank Street’s Learning Starts at Birth Initiative & the Louisiana Department of Education
   Louisiana

4. CentroNía
   Washington, DC

5. Children’s Equity Project (CEP) - University of Arizona
   National

6. Educare & Start Early
   National

7. HighScope
   National

8. New Haven Children’s Ideal Learning District (NH ChILD)
   New Haven, Connecticut

9. Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), Washington, DC
   Washington, DC
Partner goals and outcomes

SEED projects varied in their scope, geography, and target audience in addressing one or more of the stated objectives of the fund. Some programs had national reach, while others focused on individuals. Some partners invested in high school students early in their careers while others worked with seasoned educators through a coaching model. Some partners worked in a single center, others took a state, district, or networked approach. In this section, we summarize the work of each project, including its goals, outcomes, and other unexpected lessons learned.

SEED fund goals addressed by partners

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“All children, regardless of ethnicity, ability, or economic status are able to empathize and be sensitive to others different from themselves if schooled and nurtured in an environment that celebrates, acknowledges, and respects diversity.”

– Iruka et al., (2020)
While educators of color in the United States have worked to advance racial equity in education for centuries, in 1989 a book was published that is often cited as the beginning of the modern "anti-bias" movement in early care and education. Louise Derman-Sparks, one of the original teachers in the Perry Preschool Project and a member of the NAEYC Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force released "Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children." The book, which asserts that young children are aware of the power connected to racial identity, was aimed at the caregivers and educators of young children to challenge bias, prejudice and stereotyping. "What If All The Kids Are White: Anti-Bias Multicultural Education With Young Children And Families" followed in 2006. These texts have had a lasting impact on educators and were followed up in 2015 with "Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs: A Guide For Change". Derman-Sparks underscored four central goals for children and families in the texts:

- **Goal 1**: Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
- **Goal 2**: Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
- **Goal 3**: Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
- **Goal 4**: Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

While anti-bias efforts gained steam, many researchers and leaders argued for a structural lens to solve pervasive racialized inequities in education. As Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg asserts, "the anti-bias curriculum ignores the systemic and racial inequities embedded in various components of early childhood education, and the goals of the program, including teaching strategies and guidelines, lack institutional and systemic focus." In recent years, the field has begun to heed the call from these leaders, shifting from work on individualized "anti-bias" programs toward "anti-bias, anti-racist" (ABAR) efforts like those led by SEED partners. As anti-racist and racial equity work move forward it is imperative that we acknowledge and address racism's effects at multiple levels.
Racism operates dynamically across interconnected levels. **Individual** racism refers to bias or discrimination by or toward an individual. **Institutional** racism refers to racism perpetuated by the policies or practices (formal or informal) of a single institution, like a school or child care center. Finally, **structural** racism is the result of forces larger than a school or center, like a law or system of laws (e.g., funding policies). Approaches to educator development will ideally include meaningful learning and skill development related to each of these levels.

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<th>Examples of how racism operates</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Structural</th>
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<td>• Educator bias against Black children manifests in the quality of teacher-student interactions, expectations, and discipline strategies</td>
<td>• Center-based policies or practices that de-emphasize home languages, or ignore race and racism</td>
<td>• Historic and current policies that result in segregation by race</td>
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<td>• Inaccurate understanding of history and/or science (as related to race and racism)</td>
<td>• Teaching activities selected by White educators that center White culture</td>
<td>• Textbooks that perpetuate deficit-based thinking about children of color and uphold Whiteness as the norm</td>
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<th>Example opportunities to advance anti-racism and racial equity in educator development</th>
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<td>• Educator development programs rooted in anti-racist principles that equip educators with accurate knowledge of the history and ongoing effects of racism, and provide them with opportunities to understand their own identities and biases, as well as methods to support children’s positive racial identities/agency</td>
<td>• Antiracist strategic planning, incorporating -elements such as a clearly defined anti-racist mission or policy</td>
<td>• Changing regulations to guide equitable funding, re-writing educator textbooks, revising early educator preparation standards, transforming pre-service education programs (e.g., admissions, curricula, practicum placements, rubrics for evaluation)</td>
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<td>• Ongoing professional development support for anti-bias/anti-racist adult learning (including cultivating anti-racist/anti-bias parent relationships)</td>
<td>• Anti-bias/anti-racist coaching to support staff in their development as they interact with children</td>
<td>• Ensuring representation of diverse faculty in higher education</td>
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These are just a few examples of how racism operates at multiple levels in early learning environments. Importantly, specialized tools and resources are required to assess the effectiveness of anti-bias/anti-racist efforts. For more information on how to measure racial equity in learning environments, see Trust for Learning’s recent report, *Measuring the Quality of Early Learning Environments.*
AVANCE

Established in 1973, AVANCE is a non-profit organization, primarily serving Latino families in Texas with high-quality, culturally-responsive, two-generation programming that ensures school-readiness for young children and opportunities for parents to build social and economic capital.

SEED project goal

Develop a continuing education program in the AVANCE Rio Grande Valley program and support women from disadvantaged communities to further their educational goals through Serena Simmons Connelly scholarships.

Outcomes

Funds from the SEED initiative were used to develop a continuing education program for Head Start and Early Head Start educators in AVANCE’s Rio Grande Valley program. All teachers were assessed to determine who needed to further their education to meet minimum standards, and who wanted to further their education as a personal or professional goal. Through this process, four Head Start and Early Head Start teachers who were already enrolled in postsecondary institutions were identified, as well as 20 who were not yet enrolled but were interested in enrolling within the year. AVANCE staff developed partnerships with South Texas College and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and worked with all 24 teachers to create continuing education plans to ensure they could further their education on a timeline compatible with their work and home life.

Of these twenty-four, 100% completed the program:

- one teacher completed a Bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education;
- four completed their Child Development Associate certificate;
- eleven teachers are currently enrolled in an Early Childhood Education degree program:
  - three are pursuing Bachelor’s degrees,
  - five are pursuing Associate’s degrees,
  - three are pursuing Child Development Associate’s degrees; and
- eight teachers have enrolled in an Early Childhood Education degree program.

A video testimonial from JoAnn Lara, one of the Serena Simmons Connelly scholarship program participants, is available here. JoAnn was recognized by Toyota and the National Center for Families Learning as an outstanding teacher!
Avenue Scholars (Grow Your Own) & Educare Omaha

Educare Omaha is dedicated to helping families raise strong and healthy children. Across the U.S., Educare schools strive to boost the quality and effectiveness of other early childhood programs and serve as demonstration sites where lawmakers and business leaders can learn about the wisdom of investing in the first five years.

Note: This project was funded by multiple partners who have committed to different supports in a diverse and complex project. SEED funds were a small part and were leveraged to support the 9-month internship phase of the program.

SEED project goal

Develop a Grow Your Own Omaha (GYOO) program to create a pipeline of early childhood educators through an apprenticeship model, beginning with a paid high school internship within the Educare Network (learn more about the program in this video).

Outcomes

Four high school students went through a robust two-week orientation in June 2021 to assist them with understanding the importance of providing high quality early childhood education and prepare them for working directly with children and families within their schools. The following topics were covered during the orientation to jumpstart their work and understanding of the field:

- Confidentiality
- Infection Control Practices
- Medication Administration
- Child Abuse & Neglect
- Safe Sleep
- ECE Nutrition Training
- Overview of Child Assessments and Evaluations
- CPR/First Aid
- Emergency Preparedness
- Prepare to Care
- Child Care Center Regulations
- Active Supervision
- Teaching Strategies Gold
- Construct Coaching
- Interactions and Guidance
- Standards of Conduct
- Head Start 101
- Partnering with Families
- Touchpoints
- Conscious Discipline
- High Quality Teaching Practices
- Embedded Professional Development

“I have loved mentoring and watching Alexis blossom into a phenomenal member of our team. Alexis goes above and beyond connecting, building, and engaging in those relationships, not only with the team we have in our classroom but with the other teachers in the center as well. She loves to play and engage with the children, who love and adore her. The days Alexis is here; the day is full of laughter; the children love to play with her.”

– Techira L., participating educator

As a part of the onboarding process each of the four students was assigned a personal mentor teacher who worked directly with them. Students had the opportunity to learn how to prepare/write lesson plans and deliver instruction to children as well as attend meetings with families during coaching sessions. As shown in the quote above, mentor teachers have shared high praise about working with their interns.

At the conclusion of the internship in June 2022, students obtained their CDA and have 19.5 college credit hours. Plans are in progress for 2022-2023 to increase the program to 10 participants in 5 centers.
**Bank Street’s Learning Starts at Birth Initiative & the Louisiana Department of Education**

*Bank Street College* seeks to improve the education of children and their teachers by applying to the education process all available knowledge about learning and growth and by connecting teaching and learning meaningfully to the outside world. In so doing, they seek to strengthen not only individuals, but the community as well, in pursuit of improved societal outcomes.

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) is committed to ensuring that every child and school has the opportunity to grow and thrive. One of its areas of focus is *Access to Quality Early Childhood Education*.

*Note: This project leveraged additional funding from the LA Department of Education.*

**SEED project goal**

Reduce barriers to participation for low-income educators and educators of color in high-quality models of educator development by establishing high-quality coaching and professional development support for educators enrolled in Louisiana’s Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate (ECAC) programs.

**Outcomes**

Twenty-one coaches were selected from one Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) partner and one professional learning organization to participate in a ten-session coaching pilot, which was organized around four elements of effective coaching:

- Ways of Being;
- Development, Identity, and Culture;
- Educator Practice; and
- Complexities of the Coaching Ecosystem.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) were implemented after each session to encourage a deeper understanding of the tools and methods. Coach Supervisors were prepared to eventually lead PLCs made up of their direct reports, using a gradual handoff approach, to help sustain the work by enabling them to lead group reflective practice centered around the coaching framework.

Overall, 85% of coaches completed the program. Throughout the series, coaches committed to try new strategies after the learning sessions. Bank Street dedicated two sessions to racial and cultural identity and 100% of coaches reported that this helped them prepare for their next coaching visit. Overall satisfaction with the program was 100%. Coach scores improved in all areas from pre-assessment to post-assessment, with the most significant growth in the areas of Educator Practice and Complexities of the Coaching Ecosystem. Through this engagement, Bank Street finalized and broadly released a *coaching competencies framework* that defines a Bank Street approach to coaching in ECE settings and can be used with new partners. A set of formal recommendations to LDOE leadership to scale this reflective approach to coaching was also developed.
CentroNía

CentroNía provides affordable, quality early childhood education, professional development to educators, and family support services in a bilingual and multicultural environment to more than 2,400 children and families experiencing socio-economic hardship in Washington, DC.

SEED project goal
Create and implement a 45-hour professional development module in Bilingual Special Education for prospective early childhood educators to ensure educators can distinguish between typical bilingual development and emerging language disorders.

Outcomes
Bilingual (Spanish-English) content was created covering several subject areas to ensure that staff working with bilingual children and their families have the tools they need to deliver high quality services, including:

- Second-Language Acquisition Myths & Process;
- Brain Development;
- Mediated Learning;
- Impact of the Environment on the Brain;
- Cultural Bias about Special Education;
- Physical Atypical Development; Language Atypical Development;
- Socio-Emotional Atypical Development;
- Cognitive Atypical Development;
- Assessment of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children;
- Atypical Development Manifestations in Infants, Toddlers, and Pre-Kindergarten;
- Teacher Competencies to Work with CLDE Children; Bilingual IFSP/IEP.

Pre- and post-tests are a seminal part of each training to assess participant learning. The pilot implementation took place during CentroNia's Professional Development Retreat Week of August 22-26, 2022 with 70 educators from across 4 centers participating.
About Children’s Equity Project

Children’s Equity Project (CEP) works at the intersection of research, practice, and policy with a mission to close opportunity gaps and dismantle systemic racism in learning settings to ensure that children reach their full potential.

About the Council for Professional Recognition

The Council promotes improved performance for professionals in early childhood education around the field’s credentialing entry point: the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

SEED project goal

Partner with the Council for Professional Recognition to review and modify the content and credentialing process of the CDA with the goal of more thoroughly embedding racial, cultural and linguistic equity.

Outcomes

The CDA curriculum Essentials For Working with Young Children, prepares candidates for entry-level positions in the field and includes 6 competency areas:

- Establishing a safe and healthy learning environment
- Supporting physical and intellectual development
- Supporting social and emotional development
- Building relationships with families
- Ensuring a well-run, purposeful program
- Maintaining a commitment to professionalism

CEP worked to review and directly edit the 6 competency areas to deeply embed racial, cultural and linguistic equity in the CDA curriculum. This will substantially impact the knowledge thousands of providers will bring into their workplaces, ensuring a greater understanding of equity, inclusion, and social justice through a developmental lens. Given the role that the Council and the CDA play in the ECE field, it is also possible that other credentials and content standards will be influenced by this work.

“Unfortunately, there are many structural inequities in the early care and the education field. This work comes at a crucial time. We want every aspect of our credentialing process to reflect the diversity in the field and give educators the tools to ensure their students are successful.”

– Calvin E. Moore, Jr., Chief Executive Officer of the Council for Professional Recognition

“Systemic racism exists in every U.S. system. The early care and education system is no exception, and sadly, even our youngest learners are not immune to its effects. It’s essential that every part of our system centers around equity and identifies actionable ways to address it. We’re thankful for the support, and humbled to partner with the Council, who has led on these issues for decades, on this exciting new endeavor to concretely embed equity into the foundation of the credentialing process.”

– Shantel Meek, Professor of practice and the founding director of the Children’s Equity Project (CEP) at Arizona State University
Educare & Start Early

Educare works in 25 schools across 15 states and DC to ensure that young children from under-resourced communities have the best possible chance for success in life. Its approach extends beyond the classroom to help children, families, and neighborhoods thrive. Start Early, a primary partner of Educare, provides doula, home visiting, and Early Head Start and Head Start programs, and advocates for thoughtful policies and adequate funding at the local, state, and federal levels.

Note: This SEED partner received additional funding for this project from the Buffett Early Childhood Fund.

SEED project goal
Embed diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) content into the Essential Practices of Educare (EPE), a series of training modules designed to build early childhood professionals’ capacity to deliver high-quality instruction.

Outcomes
Educare created an Advisory Committee that included 18 racial equity leaders from a range of disciplines to lend their expertise and perspectives to the EPE revisions. At committee meetings, Start Early staff and consultants gathered Committee members’ input on best practices in adult learning, DEIB training, and bringing an anti-bias/anti-racist lens to the training of early childhood professionals. The Advisory Committee advised on the development of the grant-funded materials, including an Equity Audit Tool, and helped develop a theory of action for the project:

If WE: Model and prepare ECE professionals to understand, engage, and embed the tenets of ABAR and the DEIB framework into their work via EPE training sessions,

THEN: We will ensure that PD facilitators and staff at Educare schools are able to change their mindset and behavior appropriately towards high-quality, equity-centered early childhood care and learning, and the members of the ECE workforce will be more equipped to interrupt bias, racism and oppressive systems in their classrooms, schools and communities.

In all, 245 total recommendations were made and implemented across the modules. In addition, Educare developed a guide to support implementation of the changes and revisions to EPE content. Themes of the recommendations included:

- Ensuring the use of asset-based instead of deficit-based language
- Honoring and incorporating participants’ identities in trainings
- Cultivating psychological safety in training spaces
- Making & repairing DEIB mistakes during training

Educare is finalizing a Train-the-Trainer (TTT) module, which is intended to support and equip EPE trainers with skills and mindsets necessary to create anti-bias and anti-racist programs.
HighScope creates strong instructional leaders across the country and around the world, helping programs build capacity for sustained positive outcomes and ensuring every teacher is supported and every child can thrive. They work side-by-side with teachers and programs to study classroom practice and child outcomes, and use research to support local, state, and national policies that advance the field of early childhood education.

Note: HighScope received additional funding for this project from the Stranahan Foundation.

SEED project goals
Embed a new anti-bias curriculum into professional development programs and transition professional development to virtual platforms that are more accessible to educators.

Outcomes
HighScope migrated 5 of its in-person courses’ content onto an online platform. As a result, 154 educators have already accessed virtual training; participants include teachers and assistant teachers from Michigan, Colorado, Ohio, Texas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, and New Jersey. Course content is now disseminated and completed over several weeks, which allows for greater practice and feedback as opposed to digesting all of the content in one or two days and then trying to use it on one’s own. In addition, asynchronous courses can now be completed outside of traditional classroom work time. This is critical since many teachers do not have coverage of their teaching responsibilities when completing educator development and often must complete the work on their own time. The grant also provided $10,000 in scholarship support (with another $10,000 matched by HighScope), to enable educators living below the poverty level to access training. The largest group of participants (43%) were Head Start/Early Head Start providers earning less than $27,000 per year.

As part of this project, HighScope contracted with a race, equity, diversity, and inclusion (REDI) consultant, Dr. Iheoma Iruka, to review and add anti-bias/anti-racist content to the syllabus and learning units for five HighScope courses.

Consultant recommendations that were incorporated into educator coursework

- examples of valuing diversity
- inclusion of photos (children, teachers, families)
- video segments of diverse classrooms
- thoughtful adult-child interactions that include give and take conversations
- intentionally teaching about race and the importance of valuing race, diversity, linguistics, and differing abilities
- children’s books to support specific topics around valuing race and diversity
- references to articles, websites, or videos that increase awareness and extend learning of inequities and ways to support anti-bias/anti-racist learning in the classroom.

An overall REDI statement was developed and is now included at the beginning of each virtual HighScope course along with a scoring rubric that can be applied to all future courses as they are developed.

“In keeping with HighScope’s commitment to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion, each of our newly developed and updated courses will support teachers in exploring their own biases as well as intentionality around understanding and affirming young children's racial and social identities.”

– Kimberly Diamond-Berry, former Director of Research Policy and Practice at the HighScope Educational Research Foundation
New Haven Children’s Ideal Learning District (NH ChILD)

NH ChILD is a non-profit organization dedicated to transforming the early learning landscape in New Haven with the goal of providing quality care and education to all children from birth to age 8. It does this work collectively, building on the strength of the existing early childhood community in New Haven, including dedicated leadership from the New Haven Early Childhood Council, the City of New Haven, and New Haven Public Schools among others.

SEED project goal
Design and offer a two-course, CDA intensive at Gateway Community College that embeds ideal learning-aligned content and experiences as well as a racial equity framework.

Outcomes
NH ChILD's SEED Project supported New Haven's diverse early childhood educator workforce by providing scholarship opportunities for working educators most in need of CDA credentials. Many of New Haven's classroom support staff, often women of color living at or near the poverty level, have years of experience but lack an early childhood credential that puts them on the ECE career ladder. While NH ChILD's program was open to all, recruitment focused on educators living in New Haven's Housing Authority or working in programs in danger of not meeting the state's definition of qualified staff.

NH ChILD collaborated with Gateway Community College (GCC) to design and offer the two-course intensive including content and experiences aligned with the principles of ideal learning environments and a racial equity framework. Added were an introduction to the principles, a spotlight on diversity, equity and inclusion with an accompanying video, site visits to high quality programs and additional spotlights on play and environment. This curriculum and supplemental materials can now be used in future courses.

Educators who successfully completed the program demonstrated 100% proficiency in understanding of IL principles as measured by course assessments and presentations. In addition, students' evaluations in their respective work settings demonstrated application of the learning from class assignments and activities. When participants assessed the usefulness of the course information, they shared:

- “Having a different learning technique for every child according to the way that they learn.”
- “How important healthy development in the early years is and building relationships, guidance, and emotional understanding.”
- “Understand the true growth of each child’s individual learning needs.”

Student success after the program was also documented for a number of participants:

**Student 1** – a self-described babysitter, lives in low income housing and had an unlicensed daycare in her home. She was so proud to share that she got a job in a Head Start program.

**Student 2** – changed jobs to work in a Head Start program for better hours, benefits and pay.

**Student 3** – wanted to change careers. She is now working in a local community program.

Additionally, **four** students from the CDA program chose to participate in the NH ChILD Professional Learning Communities (funded separately by Trust for Learning) to deepen their knowledge of ideal learning environments and continue to build community.
Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), Washington, DC

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is the state education agency for the District of Columbia charged with raising the quality of education for all DC residents. OSSE works closely with the District’s traditional and public charter schools to achieve its key functions: ensuring access to high-quality child care and universal pre-kindergarten for eligible District families and providing resources and support to assist the District’s most vulnerable student populations.

SEED project goal
Create a curriculum toolkit designed to aid early childhood educators in developing and delivering culturally inclusive and responsive programming to children from birth to 5 years. Additionally, develop and implement a “train the trainer” model designed to ensure that all systems including Head Start, District of Columbia public schools and charter schools have equitable access to curriculum and training.

Outcomes
The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) partnered with the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) to develop a comprehensive Equity and Cultural Responsiveness Series training program consisting of four training modules, a facilitator’s guide, and a toolkit on equity and cultural responsiveness in early care and education.

The four modules are:
- Module 1: Culture and Equity in Early Childhood
- Module 2: Implicit Bias
- Module 3: Privilege and Poverty
- Module 4: Fostering Equitable Environments in Early Childhood Systems

OSSE worked with a number of partners in delivering these trainings, including: the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) quality facilitators, DC Shared Service Business Alliance (DC SSBA) child care specialists (CCSs), Quality Improvement Network (QIN) coaches, District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) instructional coaches, and OSSE certified trainers. The Equity and Cultural Responsiveness in Early Care and Education Series is now incorporated into the Professional Development Information System (PDIS) for the early care and education workforce and has been offered to licensed child care development facilities participating in the District’s QRIS Capital Quality. The series is also being offered as part of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Spring Institute for early educators and has been integrated into the school district’s race and equity plan.

These systemic developments have the potential to reach thousands of early childhood educators throughout the District in 2022 and beyond.

“As a result of the SEED grant, the District of Columbia is currently offering the Equity and Cultural Responsiveness in Early Education (ECREE) series to early childhood educators. The series’ goal is to help participants develop a conceptual framework for introducing anti-bias education into their classrooms and facilities.

The SEED grant also supported an anti-bias, anti-racist training of trainers that allowed us to capacity-build and develop leadership skills of facilitators for the ECREE series. Overall, 55 trainers have participated in the train-the-trainer series, including Quality Rating and Improvement System coaches, Quality Improvement Network coaches and DC Public School educational coaches.”

– Michele Reid, DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)
Insights & recommendations

Each of the SEED partners made remarkable progress within a relatively short, 12- to 15-month time period. After working closely with these partners and learning from their reports, several high-level themes and potential next steps emerged.

COVID-19 and systemic issues continue to impact providers

Understandably, partners confronted specific challenges related to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted their work in fluctuating ways over the course of the grant period. These challenges were particularly salient for providers on the front lines caring for children, many of whom struggled with immediate needs like obtaining adequate personal protective equipment, retaining staff, and staying safe in their classrooms. In a few cases, programs had to close temporarily, delaying work on their SEED projects. Several partners reported that educators found it difficult to balance training and professional development with other life commitments during the pandemic.

All partners were impacted by pervasive issues in the field, including low educator wages and turnover. While professional learning and reflective coaching are pathways to retention, turnover continues to create enormous implementation challenges. Significant investment in early childhood which centers educator compensation continues to be a critical need for the field.

Virtual or blended teacher training can expand access in multiple ways

As stark inequities became more visible and entrenched as the COVID-19 crisis worsened, early childhood education providers, trainers, and curriculum developers responded by creating greater access to quality online materials and professional development opportunities, reducing educator costs and widening the available avenues for educator participation. These virtual resources work particularly well for providers living in rural or remote areas. While the majority of projects moving towards greater online accessibility reported positive effects on educator access regardless of location, the digital divide remains a huge issue driving inequitable access for both educators and families with young children. ECE educators do not always have access to funds for computers or tablets, nor do the programs they work within.

Trust for Learning’s 2020 Ideal Pathways report found that educator development programs aligned with ideal learning approaches range considerably in cost, accessibility, and degree granted. Some programs are free, but geographically restricted and without a credential. Other high-quality

“Investments in the ECE workforce are crucial for quality and as a support for educators doing demanding work. Robust professional learning and reflective coaching are a key to retention, yet turnover continues to create challenges in implementation. Until our system compensates ECE educators and treats the field as the professionals they are, we will continue to grapple with these issues.”

– Emily Sharrock, Associate Vice President, Bank Street Education Center
programs culminate in a Master’s degree but cost upwards of $10,000 per educator. Reducing direct costs to educators and making high-quality educator development programs more accessible is a powerful area of philanthropic opportunity as short-term investments can pay off for years. In at least one case, the SEED fund reduced overall costs per educator by 50% by transitioning to a virtual format. While it is critical to reduce educator costs and other barriers to accessing high-quality pathways, these costs will need to be borne in other ways and investment in new virtual platforms can be expensive and resource-intensive. Educator development programs aligned with the principles of ideal learning environments are necessarily human-scale. Drawing inspiration from efforts to define and defend the “true cost of care,” advocates may be well served by developing models that outline the true costs of holistic educator development, both pre-service and during professional development. Bank Street College’s Learning Starts at Birth Initiative has developed a cost calculator which can aid in this kind of planning.

Intentional collaboration with higher education takes time

Several SEED partners reported that intentional collaboration with local institutes of higher education (IHE) was vital to their success. Efforts to create relationships with staff at local colleges and universities resulted in simpler transitions for educators. For example, AVANCE hosted a training at South Texas College to announce the SEED program and worked collaboratively with the Early Childhood Director to help students navigate registration and transfers to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, the local four-year institution offering a Bachelor of Arts in Early Education. Similarly, Avenue Scholars staff worked closely with partners at Metropolitan Community College to ensure that interns can continue their studies upon completion of their program.

While most SEED partners were successful in their work with IHEs, there were also reports of time delays and difficulty in cultivating successful relationships. These experiences underscore recommendations from the Trust’s Pathways report that greater collaboration and formal articulation agreements with IHEs are critical to ensure successful transitions for early childhood educators.

Shared efforts to integrate ABAR in curricula resulted in valuable cross-pollination

As virtual meetings became commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic, partners began to organically work across distance toward their common goals. In many cases, our partners worked together or gave feedback on each other’s projects and served on one another’s advisory teams.

Dedicated support for non-traditional students is needed

Several partners demonstrated that dedicated mentorship and logistical support were needed to help “non-traditional” students persist in their coursework and training. Avenue Scholars integrated a mentorship component as a key part of their Grow Your Own Omaha initiative, and AVANCE worked individually with educators to create continuing education plans to further their education on a timeline compatible with their work and home lives. This one-on-one support allowed participants to ask questions, talk through challenges, and rely on an ally invested in their development. In particular, support navigating the complexities of higher education requirements and systems was essential.
Tools and resources are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-bias/anti-racist efforts

For programs integrating anti-bias/anti-racist strategies into their training and education curricula, we can already see the immediate outputs of these efforts, as updated materials are newly available to participants or forthcoming soon. However, we do not know to what extent these ABAR efforts will be effective at reducing individual educator bias and supporting more equitable outcomes for children.

This is a longstanding challenge that philanthropic funders are well-suited to support. According to Carter et al (2020) organizations in the United States invest heavily in diversity training (nearly $8 billion annually). While some best practices are well-established, questions about efficacy remain, particularly for educators whose role is so essential in the formation of positive racial identity development. We know that even well-intentioned educators are not free from bias, so research and measurement of these efforts is essential.

Trust for Learning’s recent report, Measuring the Quality of Early Learning Environments, highlights measures of program quality aligned with the principles of ideal learning environments, including a section on evaluating racial equity in the learning environment. For example, the Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale (ACSES) examines the equitable experiences of children of color in a learning environment.

There have been some studies attempting to capture the efficacy of ABAR approaches. Often cited are the complexities involved in attempting to measure attributes like “racism”, “whiteness”, and “prejudice.” There are, however, many recommendations as to how to create and implement impactful training for teachers and administrators, and several of these are seen in the work of partners in the SEED Grant Initiative. These include:

- Engaging young children in issues of unfairness and race by using self-reflection about teachers’ own thinking, thus positioning the adult as a partner in learning.
- Ensuring that diversity and other inclusion initiatives are coupled with anti-bias training.
- Utilizing a broader definition of play that includes cultural differences and diverse forms of play that may be misidentified by educators.
- Encouraging children to reflect on the systems in place around them.

As Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg notes, the field lacks a coherent, shared approach to facilitating and evaluating ABAR efforts, particularly those aimed at educator development. For example, while the ACSES scale examines educator-child interactions, bias can manifest in many ways that are not currently measured, including engagement with families and selection of classroom reading materials.

“As a field, we can develop an integrated pedagogical approach to early childhood education that involves teaching and learning activities, curricula, and classroom environments that coalesce around the central goals of promoting positive racial identity and resistance to racism in racialized children (while fostering anti-racist consciousness and activism in their white counterparts). Thus, to fully address the broad range of anti-racism initiatives germane to early years settings, future research should explore how all pedagogical dimensions including curriculum—such as various educational texts, learning activities, classroom environment, and teacher-led discussions or teacher-student interactions—foster equitable learning outcomes for young racially and ethnically marginalized children.”

- Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg, Assistant Professor, Teacher Education, University of Nebraska, Omaha.

ABAR approaches, including those led by SEED partners, each represent a unique combination of goals and practices, and each is informed by conceptual beliefs about antiracism as well as trainers’ knowledge, personal biases, and experiences. We do not yet know how each of these projects will drive educator or ultimately child outcomes, but we know that well-designed, research-based training programs can be a catalyst producing ripple effects within classrooms, schools, organizations and beyond. As research continues, we have many bright lights to follow as we continue investing in the urgent and foundational work of racial equity in early childhood.
Conclusion

While the COVID-19 pandemic revealed and worsened existing disparities in early childhood, it also led to creativity and brilliance from organizations around the country who are rapidly adapting while still holding a vision of a more equitable future for all young children. At this pivotal time, a spotlight has been shined on the urgent need to reimagine how we recruit, prepare, compensate and sustain talented early educators. As of today, early childhood professional development continues to be disjointed by default. Talented educators can end up on a credentialing “pathway to nowhere”, taking courses that get them no closer to the credentials that they need to further their careers and nurture the development of our youngest community members.

The SEED fund supported highly-motivated partners to catalyze progress on equity issues impacting the diverse, committed educators who nurture and teach our nation’s children. Through equity-infused professional development, coursework and coaching, educators now have greater access to programs that support high-quality practice grounded in the first principle of ideal learning environments: a commitment to racial equity and anti-racism. Through efforts to strengthen credentialing pathways, more educators have access to supportive programs that help them advance their career and commit to the field. Partners were creative and adaptive throughout their work, lending dedicated capacity to support individual educators while creating systemic change through revisions to existing educator development programs and transitions to virtual formats to reach more educators.

Trust for Learning continues to learn from our partners and welcomes follow-up questions and conversations. Please contact cathrine@trustforlearning.org to learn more and get involved.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to each of our SEED partners, whose work over the grant period directly informed this report, which was developed by Trust for Learning’s staff and designed by Kate Purcell. Thank you to Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg, who lent her expertise to sections related to the present and future of anti-bias/anti-racist educator development. Special thanks to all of Trust for Learning’s partner funders.
About Trust for Learning

Trust for Learning is a philanthropic partnership working to expand ideal early learning environments for all young children in publicly-funded programs serving families pre-natal to age eight. Given the challenges and opportunities in the field, the Trust will embrace a new theory of change beginning in January of 2023.

We will continue to center communities of children, families and educators in all of our work. We hope to support communities at two levels: in publicly-funded learning environments around the country and in policy environments at local, state and federal levels. Our commitment to racial equity and the principles of ideal learning environments continue to provide outer boundaries and a clear lens for our work. We have found that the Trust’s philanthropic efforts are most effective when we combine three strategies in concert:

- **Direct investments** in educators and programs bringing ideal learning environments to life in diverse publicly-funded settings, as well as investment in organizations leading policy efforts.

- **Movement building** through the creation of equitable, strategic coalitions of early education providers and field leaders to advocate for ideal learning environments in concert.

- **Amplifying the work of our partners** through thought leadership including reports, events, and media engagement.

www.trustforlearning.org
References


