Diversity in Early Education

Recent research suggests that young children experience strong educational gains in racially and economically diverse preschool settings, but most early education funding still supports separate preschool experiences for low income children and children of color. This panel will look at the pre-k accreditation process, research on opportunity structures, benefits and examples of integrated early education programs. There will be collective discussion of the changes to federal and state policies that would promote more diversity in pre-k settings.

- **Jeanne Reid**, Ed.D., *Post-Doctoral Fellow*, National Center for Children and Families, Teacher's College at Columbia University
- **Josephine DiPietro-Smith**, *Principal*, Reggio Magnet for the Arts
- **Dr. Jerlean Daniel**, *Executive Director*, National Association for the Education of Young Children
- **Erin Hardy,** *Researcher,* Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University
- Moderator: **Lauren Hogan**, *Director of Public Policy,* National Black Child Development Institute

Dr. Jerlean Daniel opened the presentation with an overview of the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) pre-kindergarten program accreditation. While most states have guidelines for basic health and safety in child programming, NAEYC offers a rigorous, research-based and ***voluntary*** accreditation process. The accreditation process has a twenty-five year history but was refreshed five years ago to include four basic steps: enrollment, self assessment, candidacy and meeting/maintaining standards. During the enrollment phase, programs align themselves with NAEYC's 10 Early Childhood Program standards and use self-assessment to prove alignment. Following self-assessment completion, programs demonstrate site visit readiness and transition into the meeting/maintaining standards phase once a visit is conducted and the site is approved.

Dr. Jeanne Reid's research explores learning outcomes in pre-k classrooms that are socioeconomically integrated and those that have high concentrations of low-income students. Her goal was to evaluate whether SES composition affects the quality of pre-k learning. She found a positive association between the average SES of children in a given classroom and their receptive language, expressive language and math learning, regardless of their own SES and racial/ethnic composition of the classroom. As the average SES of the classroom increased, children learned more during the pre-K year, non-dependent on their own SES background. Reid's findings suggest that policymakers should focus on creating socioeconomically diverse classrooms that offer low-income students the opportunity to learn with their middle- and high-income peers.

Erin Hardy moved the conversation from an examination of classrooms to opportunity structures. Hardy looked at the racial composition of a child's environment as it relates to opportunity structures, particularly access to NAEYC

accredited early childhood programs. Research shows that much of the achievement gap forms during early childhood and as such, quality ECE programs can greatly assist in closing the gap. However, there are concerns regarding participation and access in low-income communities of color. If children do not have access to quality, diverse ECE programs they are at risk of missing out on the development that comes with exposure to diversity as well as a greater chance of lower educational attainment due to the systemic inequity of segregation. Her guiding research question in terms of access to diverse programs was: How are children of varying racial/ethnic groups distributed across different neighborhood "types", in terms of presence of high-quality ECE programs and other dimensions of the neighborhood "opportunity structure"? She found that there are large numbers of Black and Latino children living in low opportunity neighborhoods that also lack access to high-quality ECE resources.
Check out www.diversitydata.org for more information.

Josephine DiPietro-Smith closed the panel detailing her experiences as a teacher and administrator. Founded in the context of the *Sheff v. O'Neill* ruling, the Capitol Regional Educational Council (CREC) has a reputation for academic excellence and a strong commitment to diversity. At DiPietro's school, Reggio Magnet for the Arts, their pre-K program is 28.21% Black, 30.77% white, 38.46% Latino, 2.56% mixed-race and 46.15% free lunch. She emphasized the importance of getting to know the child as an individual and their family. She and her staff also make concerted efforts to build community by inviting parents into the classroom and distributing a daily newsletter.
Check out this video to learn more about Reggio: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujLsvXiLqFU