

4.2 Advancing Equity

Level at which the early childhood system uses anti-racist strategies to advance equity so that every child can reach their full potential.

Value

There are pervasive disparities in early childhood outcomes by race and ethnicity, and significant challenges in achieving equitable outcomes across other factors like family income, neighborhood, language spoken at home, disability status, and immigration status. Many of these disparities are the result of discrimination and deeply entrenched structural and systemic racism that perpetuate oppression and exclusion. One of the contributions of an effective early childhood system can be to focus attention on these issues and implement equity-focused solutions, including many that would not be possible for individual service providers or even a single sector such as early care and education or health care to implement on their own.

In a community with a well-functioning early childhood system, leaders and stakeholders can look across the programs and services that make up the system to assess and improve how well the system as a whole is meeting the needs of the community's entire population of young children and their families; identify where there are gaps; and pinpoint where the system is perpetuating inequities or not serving some families well. This includes looking closely at the available data to determine where there are disparities in outcomes; working alongside parents and providers with lived experience to identify the conditions, policies, and practices that lead to those disparities; and implementing anti-racist policies and strategies to address those disparities and advance equity in the early childhood system and in the community.

Getting to the root causes of inequities will likely raise some issues that can seem to be outside of the core responsibilities of an early childhood system—for example, addressing homelessness, or working with employers to provide more predictable work schedules for parents. Early childhood systems can't solve these problems on their own, but they can engage partners who are working in those areas, including parents and community residents who are directly affected, and advocate for elected officials and other community leaders to act on them. At the same time, most early childhood systems will find issues within their realm of direct influence, such as disparities in preschool expulsion and diversity of the early childhood workforce and leadership, which can and should be addressed from within the system.

Early childhood system leaders can partner across sectors to:

- ▶ Direct resources and attention to the structural and institutional issues leading to and perpetuating disparate outcomes in early childhood;
- ▶ Enact solutions developed by parents, providers, and leaders from the communities most affected by racism and discrimination; and
- ▶ Influence policies and practice within direct-service programs.

Definition

Equity has been defined as “just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.”⁹ Equity is distinct from equality, in that equity requires us to provide different levels of support based on an individual's or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes. CSSP defines anti-racism as an “active process of identifying and challenging racism, by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices, and attitudes, to redistribute power in an equitable manner.”¹⁰ To meaningfully support the health and well-being of all children and their families, public systems must move forward with a coordinated approach that is grounded in anti-racist policies and principles, acknowledging unequal starting places and removing harmful policies that perpetuate inequities.

Considering these two definitions, we can see equity as a goal, and anti-racism as a strategy for challenging systemic and institutional racism and other biases that drive disparities in our society. We cannot achieve equity without taking intentionally anti-racist approaches. This system performance measure prompts an assessment of how well leaders and stakeholders in the early childhood system are using their system-level perspective and influence to identify and implement anti-racist strategies and advance racial, economic, and social equity in the community.

The tool below is focused around ten domains which include activities at the system level and activities related to influencing practice within the sectors and programs that make up the early childhood system. Communities can use the reflective self-assessment tool to rate how well the early childhood system uses anti-racist strategies in each of these ten domains to advance equity; generate examples of what is going well and what is not; assign an overall rating to current efforts; and, most importantly, to inform discussion of what they might do differently to accelerate progress.

Implementation

Tool or Survey

A group of stakeholders from the early childhood system and the community can use the self-assessment tool provided below. [An online version of the tool using Google Forms is available here](#); communities using this will need to save the tool in their own Google account, and customize as needed, before distributing.

Summary of Steps

- 1. Set intention:** Decide on your community's goals with respect to assessing how well the system is using anti-racist strategies to advance equity.
- 2. Stakeholder engagement:** Identify early childhood system leaders or representatives, as well as parents or other community residents, to participate in the assessment process. (See note below about parents as stakeholders.) With the

⁹ Angela Glover Blackwell, Policy Link. “Equity Is...” Published October 2016. <http://putnam-consulting.com/philanthropy-411-blog/equity-is/>

¹⁰ CSSP (2019). “Key Equity Terms and Concepts: A Glossary for Shared Understanding.” Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy. Available at: <https://cssp.org/resource/key-equity-terms-concepts/>

stakeholder group, affirm or revise intentions and be clear about how you are defining the early childhood system for the purposes of this assessment.

3. Prepare stakeholders (as needed):

- a. If conversations about equity and anti-racism are new for this group or for some of the stakeholders, you may want to share the definitions section of this tool, review local or state data on disparities, or otherwise get the group to a level of understanding and readiness before beginning the assessment process.
- a. If you are engaging parents as stakeholders for this assessment, it would be beneficial to meet with them in advance to answer any questions they have about how the early childhood system operates (if they are not already engaged at the system level), talk through the questions, and either gather their ratings or ensure they feel ready to respond to the items in the assessment.

4. Field survey (optional): Field [the online survey](#) so that stakeholders can enter their ratings and illustrative examples prior to meeting to discuss. (If you are engaging any stakeholders who may not be able to access the online survey, they could share their responses over the phone or in a one-on-one meeting.)

5. Compile results (optional): Aggregate and synthesize the ratings given and examples received. It is best to share the range of ratings rather than a mean score. (Knowing that 4 people gave a rating of 1, and 4 people gave a rating of 3 on a given item, tells us far more than just knowing that the average rating was 2.) Examples that were provided should be compiled and shared with the group along with the ratings.

6. Convene stakeholders to discuss: Convene the stakeholders to talk through the assessment, reflect on the ratings if completed in advance, and determine what to do next with the information/analysis.

7. Rate: Discuss each of the ten domains in the tool, arriving at a rating of 1-4 for the question(s) within each domain. Then discuss how well the early childhood system is doing overall on using anti-racist strategies to advance equity.

8. Interpret: Communities should consider several questions as they analyze and interpret their responses on the assessment tool.

- a. What differences did you see in how various stakeholders assessed the system's current efforts? While there will always be variations in perspective among a group of people, it is particularly important to pay attention to differences by group when discussing questions related to equity. Did parents' responses differ from those of service providers and system leaders? Did people of color assess the system's efforts differently than White participants? Where you see patterns of differing perspectives, devote some extra time to discussing those perspectives. It

may be that system efforts are not visible to community members; and it may be that the efforts being made are not meeting the needs of people in the community. Both of these scenarios offer opportunities for learning and improvement.

- b. What would it take for your community to get to the next level in one or more domains, or overall? Responses may reflect various factors including political will or resources.
- c. If you achieved a level 3 or 4 in any of these domains or overall, what led to that success? How can these successes be shared with other communities to support their improvement, or carried over into other areas in your own community?

9. Plan: Determine what actions should be taken as a result of the analysis, and begin planning. Begin with the three reflective questions at the end of the assessment, and then articulate concrete actions using the action planning guide in this Toolkit. This process of planning and vetting potential actions is another opportunity to engage a broader set of stakeholders and ensure that the steps you take will serve the community well and are likely to lead to their intended results. You may also be able to use this assessment as an entrée to a larger conversation to support system building efforts, inform a strategic planning process, and/or incorporate the action steps generated through this assessment into a larger early childhood system or community plan.

10. Report back: Particularly if you gathered input from a larger group of stakeholders and not everyone participated in the interpretation and planning, be sure to share the results and next steps with all respondents.

Stakeholders

Leaders of the early childhood system should be involved in this assessment process, along with a wide range of partners representing the sectors within the early childhood system (early care and education, health, and family support) as well as community members and organizational partners who may not be as closely connected to the early childhood system building work. It is particularly important for this measure that the stakeholder group include people from a range of backgrounds who can represent multiple population groups and neighborhoods within the community, including parents of young children. The process may be led by someone in a convening or coordinating role for the system, or by a facilitator with specific expertise in equity and anti-racist work.

Be thoughtful about the best ways to get parents' perspectives on how well the system is using anti-racist strategies to advance equity, understanding that many of the strategies outlined here happen "behind the scenes," so parents who haven't already been engaged in early childhood system-building work may need a fair amount of orientation to the work before they can rate current efforts. For example, consider using a strategy informally referred to as "community guides" in which people with lived experience—in this case, parents of young children—receive training and compensation

¹¹ The model is a practical application of Culturally Responsive Evaluation, which is a framework that rejects culture-free evaluation and seeks to conduct evaluation in a way that attends to issues of culture and race. The model also has its origins as an extension of National Science Foundation recommendations for key informants and American Evaluation Association guidelines. (Acknowledgment to Drs. Karyl Askew and Monifa Beverly for sharing their leading-edge research and work in this practice.) In stakeholder engagement, evaluators seek to develop a diverse stakeholder group inclusive of people directly and indirectly impacted by a program or condition and with different statuses or levels of power and resources in order to encourage dialogue about equity and fairness. When done faithfully, CRE avoids exploitation and token representation by valuing stakeholders for the expertise they can provide and engaging them in meaningful roles and activities: "Stakeholders can educate evaluators on important history and background, help define the parameters of what is to be evaluated, identify priority questions to be addressed by the evaluation, serve as sources of information, and offer advice on other sources of evidence as well as on strategies of information-gathering appropriate to context. Stakeholders can also aid in the interpretation of data and the skillful, clear communication of findings."* Additional references to the theory and practice of CRE can be found in the Resources section of this measure. (*Hood, S., Hopson, R., & Kirkhart, K. (2015). Culturally responsive evaluation: Theory, practice, and future implications. In K. Newcomer & H. Hatry (Eds.), Handbook on practical program evaluation (4th ed., pp. 281-317). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass)

to play an active and meaningful role in the process.⁹ It also invests in the community by building the capacity of the community guides, which in itself advances equity. This model requires resources and time that may be a barrier for some systems, but it is a promising strategy for authentic engagement. In addition, system performance measure 4.1, the Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool, can help your early childhood system get on the path toward better parent engagement and leadership.

Please note that this assessment should be conducted by a group that is racially and ethnically diverse. Avoid creating a situation in which 1-2 people of color may feel burdened with representing wide swaths of the community. If the stakeholder group you would like to complete this assessment is overwhelmingly White, your first step should be finding a way to get a more representative group of stakeholders engaged in the process and making room for people and perspectives that have not been included in your system-building efforts up until now. If your community is racially and ethnically homogenous, seek out representation of other forms of diversity such as gender, sexuality, education level, disability status, family structure, or religion.

Data Sources

This performance measure uses a self-assessment tool. Participants' assessment of the system's performance may be informed by disaggregated data on child and family outcomes; quality and access data from the sectors within the early childhood system; neighborhood or community needs assessments; and other sources that can be disaggregated related to families' well-being such as employment, housing, and other community conditions.

Resources

Culturally Responsive Evaluation Resources

- ▶ Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment: <https://crea.education.illinois.edu/>
- ▶ Hood, S., Hopson, R., & Kirkhart, K. (2015). Culturally responsive evaluation: Theory, practice, and future implications. In K. Newcomer & H. Hatry (Eds.), *Handbook on practical program evaluation* (4th ed., pp. 281–317). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- ▶ [The 2020 User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation](#), 2010, National Science Foundation

Other Resources

- ▶ [Equitable Grantmaking Continuum](#), NonprofitAF.com and RVCSeattle.com
- ▶ [Key Equity Terms and Concepts: A Glossary for Shared Understanding](#), Center for the Study of Social Policy
- ▶ [Principles for Anti-Racist Policymaking](#), Center for the Study of Social Policy
- ▶ [Race Equity Impact Assessment](#), Center for the Study of Social Policy—Supports the assessment of the potential racial equity impacts of a given policy, program, or practice, particularly related to child welfare services
- ▶ [RACE Matters: Organizational Assessment](#), Annie E. Casey Foundation—Supports the assessment of staff competencies and organizational operations that advance racial equity
- ▶ [Racial Equity Impact Assessment, Race Forward](#)—Supports the assessment of the potential racial equity impacts of a proposed action or decision
- ▶ [Racial Inequality in Policies that Impact Infants, Toddlers, and Families](#), Zero to Three and Center for Law and Social Policy
- ▶ [Supporting the First 1,000 Days of A Child's Life: An Anti-Racist Blueprint for Early Childhood Well-Being and Child Welfare Prevention](#), Center for the Study of Social Policy
- ▶ [What We Owe Young Children: An Anti-Racist Policy Platform for Early Childhood](#), Center for the Study of Social Policy

4.2 Advancing Equity: Rating Tool

Participating stakeholders examine how well the early childhood system uses anti-racist strategies in each of the following domains to advance equity. For the questions in each domain, we suggest that stakeholders identify:

- ▶ A tentative rating on a four-point scale about the extent to which these practices are being used, as follows:
 - 1—This is not being done yet, or is done rarely
 - 2—This is being done at times or within particular sectors
 - 3—This is being done pretty consistently across most sectors
 - 4—This is core work throughout the early childhood system
 - DK—Don't know; don't have enough information to rate this item
- ▶ An example, if they have one, that illustrates either an existing strength that the system and its leaders can build upon, and/or a challenge that they think the system needs to address in order to make progress in this area.

<p>1. Commitment to Advancing Equity</p> <p>a. Leaders of the early childhood system work to increase their understanding of the nature, severity, and root causes of disparities within the community, including local history and current and past discrimination and racist practices in areas such as housing, education, public transportation, and employment.</p> <p>b. The early childhood system has articulated an equity or anti-racist agenda to guide its internal and external strategies, developed with significant input from the communities most harmed by marginalization, racism, and discrimination.</p> <p>c. The early childhood system is implementing its equity or anti-racist agenda and/or taking action to address root causes of disparities and right past wrong.</p> <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>
<p>2. Data</p> <p>a. Both quantitative and qualitative data are gathered and analyzed to better understand challenges families are facing, such as economic struggles or housing instability; disparities in who is facing those challenges; and the stories behind those disparities.</p> <p>b. Early childhood data are routinely disaggregated and analyzed by race, ethnicity, neighborhood, and other relevant factors; and compared over time to determine whether program and system efforts are making a difference.</p> <p>c. Parents, service providers, and other community members have opportunities to help shape how data is collected, disaggregated, analyzed, understood, and shared back to the community.</p> <p>d. System and sector leaders use the data to drive action to address gaps and disparities that are revealed.</p> <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>

<p>3. Policy Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Proposed policy and practice changes are analyzed for the differential impact they may have on children and families in specific neighborhoods, racial or ethnic groups, or on parents and children with disabilities, using an impact assessment tool or process. b. Existing policies are re-examined periodically to assess their effectiveness and any unintended consequences for particular demographic groups, with a process in place to elevate and revise policies in a timely manner when they are identified as contributing to disparate outcomes. c. Parents and other community members who are most affected by policy decisions are part of the development, analysis, review, and revision of those policies. <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>
<p>4. Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Leadership of the early childhood system (such as the convening agency and key stakeholders) and of the sectors within the system (such as the health care sector) reflects the racial, ethnic, gender, and other forms of diversity of the community. b. The early childhood system is working to bring more people of color into leadership roles in early childhood with opportunities for growth and advancement, for example through fellowships, mentorship, networking with other leaders, and individual and organizational capacity building. c. Parent leaders representing the diversity of the community are welcomed as equal partners in designing solutions that will work for them and their neighbors, and are compensated fairly for their time and expertise. (A lower rating may reflect that parents are invited to give feedback on proposed changes but not treated as equitable partners, or not compensated for their work; or that the parents who are engaged as leaders are not representative of the diversity of the community.) <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>
<p>5. Partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The early childhood system connects and partners with leaders from other sectors that affect social determinants of health, such as housing agencies, employers, workforce boards, health systems, and state and local government, to address drivers of inequity and disparity. b. Early childhood system partners include grassroots organizations focused on equity, inclusion, and justice; organizations led by people of color; and parent-led organizations, so that the system benefits from the expertise of those organizations and their staff members. <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>

<p>6. Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The system consistently communicates the importance of equity and anti-racism to service providers, decision-makers, funders, families, and the community as a whole. b. Early childhood materials like posters and brochures are reflective of the families that live in the community in terms of race, ethnicity, disability, immigration status, and family structure. c. The system routinely and transparently shares information about disparities in early childhood, and progress in reducing those disparities, with parents and other community members in accessible formats and by trusted messengers. d. Materials are translated, and interpretation is offered, so that non-English-speaking families can participate fully in the programs that serve their children and in early childhood system efforts. <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>
<p>7. Access and Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. High-quality services for children and families are located equitably throughout the community and available to children and families with diverse needs. (A rating of 2 or 3 may reflect that some services, such as health clinics, are located equitably but others, such as high-quality early care and education, are not. In that case, use the example space below to elaborate on which services are widely accessible and which are not.) b. There are public transportation options or other supports for families that need to travel to access needed services. (A rating of 2 or 3 may reflect that some neighborhoods are not served by public transportation, or supports are available to access only some types of services.) c. Families are aware of how to find and access high-quality services. <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>
<p>8. Investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The system invests its resources in a manner that prioritizes communities that have been marginalized by systems, underserved, and historically underinvested in by systems. b. Funding processes are accessible to smaller, grassroots organizations and those led by people who represent the communities they serve. This may require intentional outreach, translation or interpretation services, and/or capacity-building opportunities to support the ability of those organizations to access funding and other resources. c. The system meaningfully invests in culturally-responsive programs and services, including those developed by and for communities of color. d. The system's investments are driven by the needs of the community and feedback from community stakeholders, including parents. <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>

<p>9. Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The early childhood system promotes and provides professional development opportunities on topics such as race, racism, anti-racism, implicit bias, cultural humility, and partnering equitably with parents. b. Service providers have access to coaching and consultation to help them better serve the children and families in their programs, such as infant mental health consultation to address challenging behaviors and prevent expulsion. c. Career pathways, mentorship, and professional development opportunities are available to help increase the diversity of the early childhood workforce and its leadership. d. The early childhood system advocates for – and provides – discretionary funding for programs and individuals to access professional development and capacity building opportunities. <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>
<p>10. Support and Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The early childhood system helps programs and agencies identify steps they can take to work toward more equitable outcomes, including co-designing solutions with parents, and provides funding to support that work. b. The early childhood system incentivizes or otherwise encourages programs and agencies to take concrete action on equity and anti-racism in their own services or neighborhoods. c. The early childhood system monitors the efforts and progress of programs and agencies in advancing equity and anti-racism, including by checking in with parents about their experiences, and holds programs and agencies accountable for taking steps to work toward more equitable outcomes. d. The early childhood system has a well-functioning continuous learning or continuous quality improvement process that engages stakeholders, including community providers and families, to understand what is working well, where there are gaps, and where there are opportunities to adjust, with a focus on achieving equitable outcomes. <p>Share examples of why you chose these ratings:</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p> <p>1 2 3 4 DK</p>

After considering the domains above, communities can evaluate the current performance of their early childhood system on advancing equity overall. Levels are defined as follows:

Level 1—There is limited activity related to advancing equity in the early childhood system.

Level 2—Some programs or services are focused on advancing equity, but these efforts are not crossing over into other parts of the early childhood system; there is no coordinated activity at the community or system level.

Level 3—System-level efforts are underway to work across programs and services with a focus on equity.

Level 4—Equity is a focus of the early childhood system, including tracking the effects of efforts to reduce disparities at the child, family, and/or community level.