

Black Child National Agenda:

America Must Deliver on its Promise



Equity Research Action Coalition
UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

in partnership with



NBCDI
National Black Child
Development Institute



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Black children’s lives matter. Unfortunately, Black children in the United States of America face a dual reality: growing up in the “land of opportunity” while also experiencing the reality of racism and inequities that impact their daily lives. The Equity Research Action Coalition, POINTS of ACCESS, LLC, and the National Black Child Development Institute have collaborated in creating the **Black Child National Agenda** because of the urgent need to challenge the negative and stereotypical narrative of Black children, families, and communities and to challenge policies and systems that undermine basic human rights and community wellness.



This ambitious agenda for Black children calls for actions to dismantle structural racism and systemic inequities that get in the way of Black children’s success in school and life. The policies identified are not exhaustive but represent the first step toward ensuring that we are protecting Black children and their families from racism, discrimination, and inhumane material hardships. Additionally, we must ensure that we are promoting Black children and their families’ economic security, health, and access to quality early learning opportunities, while also preserving their cultural identity and heritage.

10 POLICIES

1. Maintain Child Tax Credits and Income Supports
2. Address Racial Disparities in Wages and Career Advancement Opportunities
3. Invest in Black-Owned and Black-Led Businesses, Organizations, and Institutions
4. Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act
5. Expand Health Insurance
6. Expand Universal Access to Early Care and Education
7. Address Harsh and Unfair Discipline Practices
8. Ensure Equity in Early Intervention and Special Education
9. Ensure Culturally Responsive Curricula and Practices through Workforce Development and Training
10. Pass Reparations

These 10 policies represent a step toward fulfilling America’s promise to honor, uphold, and protect the full human rights of all Black children, families, and communities. Enacting these policies will initiate progress toward full human rights for Black Americans, but this is only the beginning. We must ensure that these policies are fully and authentically implemented through inclusive practices centering Black children and their families and communities.

INTRODUCTION

Black children in the United States of America face a dual reality: growing up in the “land of opportunity” while also experiencing the reality of racism and inequities that impact their daily lives. This duality is part of a complicated history. While many advocates and activists have worked tirelessly over hundreds of years to push America to live up to the ideals of liberty and justice for all, only within the past generation were Black people afforded full citizenship. Black people have seen some **advancements** in their opportunities to thrive since **1619**—in voting rights, educational attainment, income levels, improved health outcomes, and homeownership, among other areas. The 14th amendment of the **Constitution** was the first major step in fighting for America to live up to its ideals. More progress was made when the US signed and ratified the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (drafted and adopted in 1948) and the **International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination** (signed in 1966 and **ratified in 1994 by the United States**). However, Black people still strive for full human rights in this country.

It is essential that America honors its Constitution and the international human rights doctrine that requires the immediate elimination of all forms of racism and systemic inequities that have stripped Black children of their full human rights. As one of the original authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United States must ensure rights and protections for Black families are implemented and adhered to by all persons. All governmental entities must enact the necessary policies to ensure that Black children have equitable opportunities for healthy development, nurturing learning experiences, and life success.

Black children face a tension between taking pride in their ancestors’ fundamental role in building this country—despite the horrors of enslavement—and the reality of the lack of progress in addressing institutional racism and the lasting impacts of oppression. Today, Black people still experience significant wealth inequities. Black workers are overrepresented in industries that build wealth for others but are the least valued. These underpaid jobs in industries such as food service, child care, and healthcare provide critical support to other individuals living the American dream of upward mobility by improving their quality of life. Since 1619, Black people have continued to build the wealth of our nation, from the free labor of slavery to the unjust wages, under-resourced communities, and wage disparities of today. Even with the strides made over the past 400 years, Black people remain considerably behind White people and other non-Black people of color on almost every health, education, and wealth metric.

While Black families and children are still **thriving and remain resilient** under the combined weight of COVID-19 and racism, the barriers they face must no longer be ignored. Black children will no longer wait for America to deliver on its promise of a bright future. Particularly with ratification of the human rights doctrine in the last century, it is no longer acceptable for Americans to ignore a system that is rife with racial inequities and human rights deprivation. At this critical moment in our nation’s history, especially amid a global pandemic and mass activism demanding—again—human rights and racial justice, America’s eyes have been opened, and we all see more clearly the structural racism that exists in our society.

The Equity Research Action Coalition, POINTS of ACCESS, LLC, and the National Black Child Development Institute have collaborated in creating this **Black Child National Agenda** because of the urgent need to challenge the negative and stereotypical narrative of Black children, families, and communities and to challenge policies and systems based on those deficit-based and racist views, which undermine community wellness. This agenda calls for actions to dismantle structural racism and system inequities that get in the way of Black children's school and life success and to intentionally create pro-human rights systems. Black children must be afforded an equitable opportunity to thrive and excel. A focus on their success must start before they are born and remain in place throughout their life course.

These three organizations have partnered on this ambitious agenda for Black children at the same time that many people in our country are proclaiming *#BlackLivesMatter*. This agenda provides a blueprint for transforming systems and policies to make the phrase *#BlackChildrenMatter* a reality. The Black Child National Agenda is focused on dismantling structural racism while also centering the cultural wealth and human rights of Black people. Federal and local family- and child-facing agencies and institutions have a moral obligation and legal requirement to support the human rights of Black children and the communities into which they are born. Organizations must be bold in addressing structural racism and centering the needs of Black children and those who care for and teach them. In doing so, America will not only be enriched with **economic growth** but will **benefit** from the innovation and human ingenuity of a diverse and integrated society. We stand on the shoulders of many who have fought and continue fighting for human rights and against oppression, brutality, and injustice.

The Biden Administration, which came into office because of the voting power of Black people, has committed to advancing racial equity. The Biden Administration's **Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government** highlights the urgency of addressing the unbearable human costs of systemic racism. This executive order calls for the pursuit of a "...comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all... Because advancing equity requires a systematic approach to embedding fairness in decision-making processes, executive departments and agencies must recognize and work to redress inequities in their policies and programs that serve as barriers to equal opportunity." With this call to advance racial equity, coupled with the recently passed **American Rescue Plan** and the proposed **American Families Plan**, this is a critical moment to develop and push for programs and policies that deliver on the promise of equality and freedom.



REPORT OVERVIEW

The Black Child National Agenda begins by identifying the many areas that Black children and families are excelling even under the weight of racism. We honor the brilliance of Black families in the face of racism and oppression. Black children and families have more stability than the prevailing narrative suggests. Also, these families are more diverse—and therefore their needs are more diverse—than is commonly understood. Second, the report highlights evidence of the ways in which Black children and their families are being impacted by structural racism and systemic inequities.

Finally, the report identifies policies that center the racialized experiences and assets of Black children and their families using the 3Ps policy framework developed by Iheoma Iruka and her colleagues¹—Preserving, Protecting, and Promoting—that ensures the health, economic, education, and general well-being of Black children and their families. This report calls for policies that are effective at

- **Protecting** Black children and their families from racism, discrimination, and material hardship,
- **Promoting** Black children and their families' economic security, health, and access to quality early learning opportunities, and
- **Preserving** Black children and their families' cultural identity and heritage.

The policies identified in this agenda are not meant to be exhaustive but rather to provide a foundation for advocates' and activists' fights to ensure that Black children begin life healthy and supported in order to reach their full potential. **As with many other policies and programs that started with Black people seeking freedom and opportunity, such as the Civil Rights Movement, we know that policies centered on Black children will benefit all children.** Most importantly, this Black Child National Agenda will move us closer to racial equity.

BEING BLACK IS NOT A RISK FACTOR: Black Families Thrive in Spite of Racism

Over half a million **Black babies are born** in the US every year, which is approximately 1500 Black babies a day, or about 15% of babies born per year. The majority of babies are born into stable and safe families with diverse structures. Over 83% of Black babies are born into households that have maintained stable housing over the past year. Furthermore, over 60% of Black babies are born into households with two parents and in many instances with multiple adults, especially grandparents. Five percent of Black children live in households with their grandparents, with over 40% of those grandparents serving as primary caregiver. This statistic highlights the familial support benefiting many Black parents and children. Beyond the different constellations of the Black family unit, there is diversity in the families' nativity status, language, education, and income level. Approximately 10% of the Black population in the US is foreign-born (mostly from Africa and Latin America) and over 10% of Black households speak a language other than English in the home.

Black families' social and economic resources, coupled with public investment, make it possible for 9 out of 10 Black families to have health insurance; 40% to own homes worth at least \$175,000; 82% to own at least one vehicle; and at least 80% to have access to a computer and broadband internet service. Unfortunately, even with the increased social and economic resources that Black households have amassed over the past 20 years, over 40% of eligible workers (16 years or older) are either unemployed or not in the labor force. In 2019, 25% of Black households were categorized as living in poverty, with this number more than doubling to 58% for those categorized as low-income. Further, over 55% of Black households spend 30% or more of their gross income on rent, which makes them vulnerable to housing insecurity.

BLACK PARENT VOICES

Attending to the security of Black families is even more critical in light of the global pandemic that has exacerbated the economic vulnerability of these families. The devastating impact of the pandemic is coupled with structural racism that has systematically excluded Black people from fair and equitable access to social and economic opportunities and resources. In its national report "*Black Parent Voices: Resilience in the Face of the Two Pandemics—COVID-19 and Racism*," the **RISER Network** illustrates how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting Black families' experiences with racism and discrimination, financial security/material hardship, mental health, well-being, and early care and education options.ⁱⁱ The report highlights the following:

- Racism and discrimination have an overarching negative impact on the experiences and lives of Black children and their families, and this negative impact has continued throughout the pandemic. More than 25% of Black parents express concern about their children's experiences and treatment before and during the pandemic due to their race.
- Black families are experiencing high levels of economic instability regardless of household income level. Over 40% of Black families below/near poverty are feeling a financial strain even after the receipt of stimulus checks.
- Black parents delayed health care visits during the pandemic primarily due to concerns about being exposed to the coronavirus and an inability to find early care and education options while they attended their health visits.
- Black families use a variety of paid and unpaid early care and education options, but most families largely stopped in-person participation at the beginning of the pandemic. Thirty-two percent of Black parents reported concern for their child's care and education pre-pandemic; this number increased to 44% during the pandemic.

10 ASSETS OF BLACK PEOPLE

Adapted from the 2013 report *Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor* from the National Black Child Development Institute, Washington, DC.

1 79% of Black households have at least one parent who is employed. This is similar to White households (80%) based on the [US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey](#). Unfortunately, employment does not always translate to higher income or wealth. This is because Black people, compared to White or Asian people, are less likely to work in management, professional, and related occupations—the highest-paying major occupational category.

2 More Black children live in a household with a mother with a BA or higher degree (22%) vs. less than a high school diploma (13%). Further, almost 9% of Black people over the age of 25 have a graduate or professional degree. Over 55% have at least some college, which speaks to Black people's continued commitment to educational attainment even if it does not [the same benefit that it does for White people](#).

3 Almost 80% of Black families of preschoolers read to their children at least four days a week or tell a story. Early home literacy practices have a positive effect on children's early language and literacy and later reading achievement and school outcomes. Even in the midst of social and economic challenges, according to data from the [US Department of Education, National Household Education Survey](#), almost 8 out of 10 Black parents read to their children more than three times a week; tell a story; teach letters, words, and numbers; or engage in arts and crafts.

4 Black parents support positive social identity and high educational expectations. Black parenting is about transmitting positive messages about children's cultural background, heritage, and identity and about holding children to high expectations related to their behavior and academic learning. In line with Afrocentric parenting, Black parents emphasize values in their childrearing practices such as [family interconnectedness, independence, obedience, behaving well, and respecting others](#).

5 Three out of four Black children are in formal early care and education by age four and are likely to be in care before the age of one. Unfortunately, being in care does not guarantee that the care is affordable and of high quality, with many Black families encountering difficulties related to the [cost of care](#), meeting the [eligibility requirements for child care assistance](#), and the [quality of care](#).

6 Black children show a slight edge in cognitive skills at nine months old compared to White children. Race and income are inextricably tied in the US, making it impossible to show the competencies and skills of Black children above and beyond other social (birth weight) and economic (family income, maternal education) factors that impact their context and development. In their analyses examining racial gaps in cognitive and socio-emotional development among boys in early childhood, [Aratani and colleagues](#) (2011) found resilience among Black boys in the early years. After controlling for the economic and social disparities

for Black infants, they found that the cognitive development of Black infant boys was slightly better (although not statistically significant) than the cognitive development of White infant boys. They also found that Black boys performed better in kindergarten reading, after controlling for economic and social disparities likely to be experienced by these children.

7 Black children have strong social skills, especially cooperation during play. Socio-emotional skills are positively associated with children’s academic achievementⁱⁱⁱ. Black children show strong competency in this area, especially as it concerns emotion regulation, attention, and positive coping strategies^{iv v}. This indicates higher-order skills that Black children display in response to learning environments and settings where they are often viewed negatively.

8 Black children have strong oral narrative and storytelling skills that are part of their cultural roots and supportive of their learning. Oral language and storytelling skills are part of Afrocentric practices, and there is evidence that these skills are related to later reading achievement.^{vi} Studies show that oral language is a strong skill set of Black children compared to other children and predictive of their early literacy and later school achievement.^{vii viii}

9 More Black children ages 3-5 are able to read words in a book compared to other children. Data from Boston, Massachusetts, showed that **16% of Black children** are able to read words in a book, as compared to 8% of White, 3% of Hispanic, and 4% of Asian or Pacific Islander children. Furthermore, 38% of Black children in this age group recognize all letters of the alphabet, and 69% can count to 20 or higher.

10 Black students’ 4th-grade reading proficiency has increased by 36 points since 1971 compared to 15 points for White children. The **US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics**, notes that between the 1970s and 2012, the White-Black and White-Hispanic gaps in reading and mathematics scores narrowed as a result of Black students making larger gains in achievement during that period than White students. This trend is notable even as Black children continue to have less access to high-quality educational opportunities, with the nonprofit **EdBuild** finding that school districts serving Black (and Hispanic) students received \$23 billion less than districts enrolling a comparable number of White students.

Due to systemic racism, policies and systems in the US are still not designed to build on and promote the strengths of Black children and families. Instead, they are designed to fix and control—rather than serve and protect. For example, policies have not protected Black families and communities from predatory institutions such as check advance/check-cashing businesses, subprime lenders, and for-profit educational institutions. Racism in criminal justice has led to the over-representation of Black people in the prison-industrial complex. Systemic racism and interpersonal experiences of discrimination also impact the health and well-being of both children and adults in multiple and complex ways. However, cultural assets coupled with inclusive policies can serve to mitigate structural racism and support human rights. **There is an urgent need for pro-human rights policy actions that eliminate racism AND leverage the assets of Black families and communities.** Due to support from Black families, educators, and communities, Black children continue to thrive and excel in many areas even as they live in an ecosystem of oppression and inequitable opportunities.

Examples of Structural Racism

- Discrimination in schooling, housing, employment, criminal justice, and health care
- Segregation—residential, economic, social, and psychological
- Concentrated poverty and disinvestment in Black neighborhoods
- Mass incarceration of Black people
- Police violence against Black people
- Inequitable access to wealth generation (land, homes) and safety nets
- Voter suppression and exclusion from—or inequitable access to—political power
- Separation of families and children
- Biased immigration policies impacting communities of color

Examples of Cultural Assets

Adapted from Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth^{ix}

- Aspirational capital: ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of oppressive systems and processes
- Linguistic capital: intellectual and social skills developed by the ability to communicate in more than one language, style, or dialect
- Familial capital: cultural knowledge nurtured among kin that carries a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition
- Social capital: networks of people and community resources that provide instrumental and emotional support to successfully navigate society's institutions
- Navigational capital: skills to maneuver through social institutions not created with communities of color in mind
- Resistant capital: knowledge and skills that challenge inequality
- Perseverant capital: determination and inner confidence
- Ethnic consciousness: deep commitment to cultural group, family, and community
- Religiosity: spirituality and a sense of purpose
- Pluriversal: shifting identity, language, and behavior across multiple settings

DATA SUPPORTING THE BLACK CHILD NATIONAL AGENDA: 10 Consequences of Systemic Racism and Inequities

Listed below are just 10 examples that illustrate the consequences of the barriers that Black children, their families, and those who care for and teach them must navigate on a daily basis. These data points do not mean that children are not able or capable, but instead are an indication of the social vulnerability of Black children and their families prior to and after birth.



1 11.4 Black infants die out of 1,000 live births. Black infants are dying at a rate more than double the mortality rate of White

infants (5.0), according to the [CDC Infant Mortality in the United States report](#). The disparate impact of infant mortality for Black babies is rooted in racism and the structural inequalities experienced by Black mothers, including subpar health care. ***Black babies need protection from racism in health care that currently results in less attention to their needs from birth.***

2 16.3% of Black infants are born preterm compared to 10% of White infants. Studies have found that group prenatal care may decrease preterm births for Black mothers, further emphasizing the importance of community in supporting the health of the Black family.^x ***Black babies need promotion of culturally responsive, community-based health systems.***

3 13% of Black infants are born with low birth weight compared to 7% for White infants. Black mothers who receive robust prenatal care, including a quality patient-provider rapport, compassionate and holistic care from their health team, and extended time with providers have experienced improved birth outcomes^{xi}. ***Black babies need promotion of holistic prenatal care for their mothers.***

4 Over 60% of Black children are living in low-income households. This is higher than White children and all other racial and ethnic minorities, according to the [Kids Count Data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation](#). Implementation of the child tax credit would greatly benefit Black families and has been forecasted to boost the income of about **8 million Black families**. ***Black children need protection from poverty.***

5 Over 25% of Black children are living in high-poverty neighborhoods. Living in high-poverty neighborhoods impacts the well-being and development of children.^{xii} Though the **Fair Housing Act** has made headway in reducing housing discrimination, moving to wealthier neighborhoods may not be enough to improve outcomes for Black children. Research has found that when neighborhood income increases for Black children, they experience increased academic outcomes only if their neighborhood has a high proportion of Black families/people. **Black children need preservation of their community.**

6 Over 75% of Black children experience low-to-medium-quality child care arrangements. The price of child care is rising dramatically, and as Black families are more likely to have lower incomes, access to quality child care is less likely.^{xiii} For Black families, quality child care centers are not as available in their immediate neighborhoods.^{xiv} **Black children need promotion of their learning through high-quality child care in the early years of brain development.**

7 About 50% of preschool suspensions/expulsions involve Black children. Studies have found that Black children are perceived as older and less innocent than their White counterparts by those with power to discipline in schools, which may contribute to the disproportionate rates of punishment received by Black children.^{xv xvi} **Black children need protection from discrimination and access to inclusive and affirming early learning.**

8 A gap of more than 20 points in 4th-grade reading and math exists between Black and White children. Though the achievement gap has decreased in recent years, the gap is still substantial and has a lasting impact on student outcomes.^{xvii} Attention must be given to **ameliorating issues such as socio-economically segregated schools, access to quality kindergarten programs, and higher-quality schools** to ensure a thriving educational environment for Black children. **Black children need promotion of equal access to high-quality education.**

9 Black educators are paid \$.78 for every \$1.00 earned by White educators. This disparity remains even when **educational attainment is controlled for** in Black and White educators.^{xviii} Black students in classrooms learning from Black educators have better outcomes such as engagement graduation rates.^{xix} **Black children need preservation of economic stability in their communities.**

10 The median wealth of a Black family is \$10,700 as compared to \$170,000 for a White family (10x difference) The Black and White **racial wealth gap is higher today** than it was at the beginning of the 20th century. New policies must be created to mitigate the ongoing impact of historical injustices such as discriminatory policies and exclusion from opportunities to build generational wealth (e.g., discriminatory home loan practices such as redlining) that have disproportionately impacted the Black community (Darity et al., 2018). **Black children need promotion of wealth and protection from economic predators in their communities.**

Calling on the 3Ps of Equitable Policies for Black Children: Preserving, Protecting, and Promoting

To center the racialized experiences and assets of Black families, we call for preserving, protecting, and promoting policies and programs that transform the health, economic, education, and general well-being of Black children and their families (including caregivers, providers, educators, and communities). This means that national and local policies, programs, strategies, and resources—as well as mindsets—must attend to

- Protecting Black children and their families from residential, economic, social, and psychological segregation, racism, discrimination, oppression, and exclusion;
- Promoting Black children and their families' economic security and upward mobility; wealth generation; physical, mental, and psychosocial health; and high-quality educational opportunities; and
- Preserving Black children and their families' functioning and well-being; positive racial and cultural identity, heritage, and language; and safe and supportive communities.



BLACK CHILD AGENDA BLUEPRINT

AMERICA'S COMMITMENT TO BLACK CHILDREN

We must PROTECT Black children from trauma and harm to their physical, emotional, and cultural identities. Black children deserve physically and emotionally safe spaces free from trauma, violence, and low expectations; they deserve access to basic resources such as health care, child care, healthy food, and safe housing. We call for protective policies such as reparations, expansion of health insurance, provision for safe and adequate housing, and elimination of harsh discipline in school, as well as criminal justice reform.

We must PROMOTE Black children's healthy development, wealth generation opportunities, and educational attainment. This requires attending to policies that foster their physical, emotional, and psychosocial health; wealth and asset generation; and early care and education opportunities. We call for policies promoting the expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act, extending child tax credits and other income supports, expanding access to child care subsidies and universal Pre-K, and ensuring equity in early intervention and special education.

We must PRESERVE Black children's cultural heritage, language, traditions, and positive racial pride. This requires attending to policies and programs that combat the constant and countless negative narratives about Black communities, people, families, and children. Instead, we must focus on the strengths of this community by fully representing their contribution since 1619 and their historical and cultural assets prior to arrival in this country. We call for policies to preserve and uplift, such as addressing the racial wage gap; ensuring access to culturally responsive curricula, practices, and early childhood education workforce preparation programs; and investing in community organizations and institutions that preserve Black culture, history, and language (e.g., family child care homes; friend, family, and neighbor care; Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Black-owned businesses).

1 Maintain Child Tax Credits and Income Supports

The US Congress should make permanent the child tax credit passed in the [American Rescue Plan](#), which offsets the amount owed in taxes for low-income working families. This tax credit helps to alleviate poverty, leading to healthier and more equitable outcomes for children. In addition to expanding child tax credits, the American Rescue Plan also includes a boost to unemployment benefits and direct payments to many Americans. This legislation has the potential to [cut the poverty rates](#) for Black Americans by almost half. Another bill that could support Black families' economic stability and mobility is the proposed [American Families Plan](#).

State and local governments should also pass guaranteed income supports to supplement the wages of low-income families. **California** recently became the first state to provide monthly cash payments to qualifying pregnant women and young adults who recently left foster care; these payments could range from \$500 to \$1,000 per month. **Mayors from Atlanta, Los Angeles, Stockton, and other cities** have also joined together to explore options to provide individuals with an income floor. This may also be an opportunity to examine potential **jobs guarantees**. Funded capacity-building programs that develop job and life skills for upward mobility, financial stability, and wealth attainment should also be part of a legislative package.

2

Address Racial Disparities in Wages & Career Advancements

The US Congress must pass legislation that prevents employers from paying women, Black people, and other people of color less than men and White people and ensures equal pay for equal work regardless of race and gender. Women and Black people are paid less than their male and White counterparts across education levels and occupations. This is especially pronounced in early care and education, where the workforce earns less than the average worker and where Black workers still earn lower wages than White workers (\$.78 less per hour, or \$1,622.40 less per year, for a full-time, full-year worker).

State and local governments should pass legislation that addresses the racial and gender pay gap. Policies that address **gender wage gaps**, such as prohibiting employers from enforcing pay secrecy, banning employers from asking about past earnings, and requiring employers

to report gender wage data are needed. Other needed initiatives include raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour, passing the Wage Theft and Wage Recovery Act, and establishing wage and standards boards for pay transparency as called for by the **Black to the Future Action Fund**. These racial and gender wage gaps are especially pressing for the early care and education workforce, which is composed primarily of women of color. States can increase the value of child care subsidies as well as enact **starting salary parity** for all certified educators similar to the New York City Model that enacted such policies regardless of auspices (Head Start, Pre-K, community-based organization); age group (infant-toddler, Pre-K); or locality (urban, rural).



3

Invest in Black-Owned and Black-Led Businesses, Organizations, and Institutions

The US Congress should ensure that the Opportunity Zones created under the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which were designed to stimulate economic development and job creation by incentivizing long-term capacity-building investments in low-income neighborhoods, are reaching historically marginalized communities and are not being used to further exacerbate the wealth gap. Alongside the Jobs Act, a job training program should be rolled out to build capacities of Black people and other marginalized communities to fill newly developed roles to ensure immediate employability and self-sustainability. In order to prevent expanded wealth gaps in Black communities and push-out gentrification, expanded HUD "sweat equity" grant programs for homeownership for lower-income residents should be established in all **Opportunity Zones**. There is a concern that Black and other marginalized communities will be **disenfranchised and excluded** from equitable access to financing and funding. Rent in newly renovated properties must be moderated to safeguard affordable housing and ensure that displacement and homelessness do not increase for Black communities.

Congress should also pass the **American Families Plan**, which includes two years of subsidized tuition and expanded teacher preparation and other programs in high-demand fields at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and other minority-serving institutions (MSI). Supporting accessibility to higher education and removing barriers to entry should include expanding high-quality, affordable childcare on all HBCU and MSI campuses for students and staff.

State and local governments can expand funding and investment in historically disenfranchised communities and ensure that local residents who have been there for generations are able to benefit from such investments. Furthermore, state and local governments can set aside federal and state community investment grant funding to support Black-owned programs for capital investment and infrastructure, among other policies described by the **Center for American Progress' National Advisory Council on Eliminating the Black-White Wealth Gap**. Investments in small Black-owned business owners, such as through mentorship and entrepreneurship, are a vital part of cultivating and supporting self-sustainability and building on and strengthening community assets. Some of this investment and support can focus on home-based programs and center-based programs with historical roots in the Black community. Finally, state and local governments can also ensure that Black-owned and Black-focusing venues and community buildings are protected and preserved.

4

Expand Family and Medical Leave Act

The US Congress must expand access to family and medical leave to mandate 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave with continuous health care coverage after birth, adoption, or placement of a foster child. This would allow parents and other caregivers to provide safe and nurturing care and build a healthy attachment with the child, while also addressing unexpected physical health, mental health, or developmental challenges. Congress should also pass the **American Families Plan**,

which includes a national comprehensive paid family and medical leave program that includes a guaranteed 12 weeks of paid parental, family, and personal illness/safe leave.

State and local governments can expand access to FMLA as was done in **California**, for example, by including employers with fewer than 50 employees, waiving the rule regarding distance between employee home and company location, and allowing employees to take leave to care for extended family members.



5

Expand Health Insurance

State governments must approve coverage under the Medicaid expansion that became effective January 1, 2014. Unfortunately, most of the 12 states that have **not expanded Medicaid** (as of September 2021) are in the southeast US, where the majority of Black children live. Medicaid provides women with access to services during the perinatal period, which reduces birth disparities and the medical cost burden. The **evidence** indicates that expansion



of Medicaid has reduced—but not closed—racial disparities in insurance coverage, access and use of care, health outcomes, quality of care, and various economic measures.

6

Expand Universal Access to Early Care and Education

The US Congress should expand access to Early Head Start and Head Start by increasing funding for the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships and expand it to preschool-age children through new Head Start-Child Care and Head Start-Pre-K partnerships. Child Care and Development Block Grants (CCDBG) can be authorized to support the development of this universal program. Priority should be given to low-income families and historically marginalized communities, which includes Black communities. Moderate income subsidies must be developed and available to Black families who are experiencing financial distress to ensure equitable access to quality care and education for young Black children.

Federal agencies such as the Office of Head Start, Office of Child Care, and US Department of Education should establish a culturally responsive, trauma-sensitive universal early care and education model that is **based on the federal Head Start program**, which leverages the best of child care, Early Head Start and Head Start, and Pre-K programs. Priority should be given to low-income families and historically marginalized communities, which includes Black communities. Guidance about the use of CCDBG should also be provided to ensure that Black families are able to access financial support for child care.

State and local early care and education agencies should establish universal programs for children birth to age 5 that build from the Head Start model and leverage the best of child care, Early Head Start and Head Start, and Pre-K programs, using CCDBG funds where authorized and allocating new funding to develop, establish, evaluate, and maintain these approaches.

7

Address Harsh and Unfair Discipline

The US Congress should pass discipline reform to ban all exclusionary practices, including expulsion, suspension, corporal punishment, seclusion, and inappropriate restraint. These practices are disproportionately used against Black children and undermine social-emotional wellness. There is no evidence that these forms of discipline are effective, and they are associated with negative child outcomes. The US Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services released a **joint guidance statement** on expulsion and suspension. The purpose of this joint statement was to support families, early childhood programs, and state officials by providing recommendations for preventing and limiting expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings.

State and local governments should eliminate the use of all exclusionary practices, including expulsion, suspension, corporal punishment, seclusion, and inappropriate restraint in all public schools and programs. This type of legislation has already been passed in **Connecticut** and **Illinois**.

8

Ensure Equity in Early Intervention and Special Education

The US Congress should fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including Parts B Section 619 and C, as well as Part D, focused on monitoring, accountability, and equity. Black children’s disabilities are often either unidentified or classified under subjective disability categories; inaccurate classification can undermine development. When Black children and families do receive services, they are often not culturally congruent and of lower quality.

Federal agencies must request disaggregation by race, ethnicity, income, gender, and disability category (and their intersection, such as disability by race and gender) to ensure there are no racial and gender disparities in overrepresentation and underrepresentation. Technical assistance should be provided to programs where there are disparities related to access, experiences, and outcomes.

State agencies must track and address racial, gender, income, language, and disability disparities in access and high-quality inclusive placements. They must also invest in meaningful structural reforms to expand access to high-quality inclusion placements, especially in historically marginalized communities. There is also a need to attend to a racially diverse workforce in early intervention and special education services.

9

Ensure Culturally Responsive Curricula and Practices Through Workforce Development and Training

Federal agencies must support the development and implementation of culturally responsive, trauma-sensitive, and developmentally appropriate curriculum practices by supporting the development and training of the early care and education workforce. **African-centered, culturally responsive curricula and practices** are critical to supporting the social-emotional, intellectual, and academic development of Black children. The current early childhood education system focuses almost exclusively on Eurocentric, middle-class cultural values, literacies, and teaching practices. Supporting holistic healthy development by leveraging children’s cultural and linguistic assets, while building on prior knowledge, is a vital part of creating psychologically safe spaces. Federal agencies can fund the development of new curricula and workforce training programs that support Black children’s learning and development, as well as the development of national standards that ensure programs that predominantly care for and teach Black children can implement culturally responsive curricula, practices, and workforce training.

State and local early care and education agencies and public education institutions could provide technical assistance and targeted funding to support culturally responsive curricula, practices, and workforce training. These agencies can also identify and expand access to schools and programs that are implementing these practices.

10

Pass Reparations

The US Congress should pass [H.R. 40: Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act](#). This legislation will establish a commission to study reparation proposals, including examining slavery and discrimination in the US from 1619 to the present and recommending appropriate remedies. Attention to this issue has been supported by the [United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent](#), which explicitly declared that the US government owes reparations to Black Americans.

State and local governments should study, recommend, and implement appropriate reparations to redress past racial injustices against African American families. Mayors in 11 cities across the US have already committed to developing [pilot projects for reparations](#), from addressing housing segregation to returning stolen land. National experts on reparation, such as [Dr. William "Sandy" Darity](#), have called for cash payments and other economic assets to be awarded to eligible recipients to eliminate the Black-White wealth gap, which stands, on average, at \$800,000. Closing intergenerational land and wealth gaps through homeownership and sustainable upward mobility must be a primary consideration of reparations legislation.

Federal Protection to Support Black Equity and Community Self-Sustainability

[Special Field Orders, No. 15](#) is a mandate from 1865 on the enactment of Emancipation that stipulated that freed Africans were to receive roughly 400,000 acres or more of rich agricultural land near waterways to ensure sustainable food sources, with US military protections. Each head of household was to receive the title of ownership of approximately 40 acres to ensure the transfer of land wealth intergenerationally and promote upward mobility through education, business development, and all other provisions to support Black equity and community self-sustainability. While the US should not dictate where Black families live, our nation does have an obligation to ensure homeownership rights are returned to all descendants of former enslaved Africans. Additionally, US federal protections are warranted to ensure that full human rights are afforded to Black people intergenerationally and to prevent the passage of inhumane, abusive laws by state or local governmental entities.

CONCLUSION

There are many other policies that should be passed and implemented—as well as challenged and dismantled—in order for Black children to reach their potential.

These policies are related to criminal justice reform, financing and bank reform, business development, public education, climate change, and highways and transportation.

Nevertheless, the 10 policies outlined above are a step toward demonstrating that the lives and HUMAN RIGHTS of Black children and their families and communities do matter in America. Black children deserve PRESERVATION of their cultural heritage, PROTECTION from social and physical harm, and PROMOTION of their health and wealth.

Passing these policies will demonstrate progress toward full human rights for Black Americans, but they represent only the first step. We must ensure that these policies are fully and authentically implemented through inclusive practices centering Black children and their families and communities. The [2010 Racial Equity Toolkit for Policies, Programs, and Budget](#) report from the Race & Social Justice Initiative and the [Toolkit for State and Local Human Rights and Human Relations Commissions](#) by the Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute identified the following principles of anti-racist, social justice, and human rights policymaking for federal, state, and local agencies and policymakers:

- 1 Assess community conditions and desired impact and outcomes.
- 2 Determine how your policies and strategies will achieve equality in outcomes for all, regardless of economic, racial, or gender status, ethnic origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, or other status.
- 3 Expand opportunity and access for individuals and communities to experience full human rights.
- 4 Effect systemic change and accountability for adherence to pro-human rights policies, especially ones that address discrimination in all its forms—regardless of intent.
- 5 Promote pro-human rights and racially inclusive collaboration, engagement, and co-creation.
- 6 Educate agencies and policymakers on human rights doctrine and racial issues and elevate racial equity consciousness.
- 7 Use data/tools to make sound decisions on pro-human rights policies that ensure racial equity.

“While you can’t necessarily bend history to your will, you can do your part to see that, in the words of Dr. King, it ‘bends toward justice.’ So I hope that you will stand up and do what you can to serve your community, shape our history, and enrich both your own life and the lives of others across this country.”

Barack Obama

PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS

Equity Research Action Coalition at the UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

The Equity Research Action Coalition, a university-based collaborative, focuses on co-constructing with practitioners and policymakers actionable research and evaluation to support the optimal development of Black children, prenatal through childhood. The Coalition works at the intersection of research, program, and practice through anti-racist and cultural wealth frameworks. The Coalition focuses on developing a science-based action framework to eradicate the impact of racism and poverty and all its consequences on the lives of Black children, families, and communities, and to ensure their optimal health and well-being. The Coalition is focused on asset-based research and equitable policies and practices.

National Black Child Development Institute

For more than 50 years, the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) has been at the forefront of engaging diverse stakeholders to address critical and timely issues that directly impact Black children and families. From the establishment of NBCDI in 1970, the Institute's focus has been on achieving positive outcomes for vulnerable children who suffer from the dual legacies of poverty and racial discrimination. NBCDI's mission is to "improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and families through education and advocacy." NBCDI was launched by the Black Women's Community Development Foundation, whose leadership, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, was concerned about the unsatisfactory conditions faced by families determined to raise healthy Black children. By organizing NBCDI as a national advocacy organization, these leaders created a movement to improve the life circumstances of Black children.

NBCDI is one of the leading organizations working on behalf of Black children. The Institute implements evidence-based, strengths-based, trauma-informed, and culturally relevant programs that respond to the unique strengths and needs of Black children around issues including early childhood education, family engagement, literacy, and health and wellness. NBCDI, its National Affiliate Network, and its members also advocate for and inform education policies at the federal, state, and local levels to support equitable systems for Black children and families across the country.

POINTS of ACCESS

POINTS of ACCESS, LLC is a social innovation agency whose experienced trans-disciplinary team partners with schools and agencies to build the capacity of organizations that are shaped by community assets and strengthened by inclusive, equitable policies for sustainability. POINTS OF ACCESS works at the intersection of relational health and education across multiple sectors. The agency's professional coaching is grounded in neuroscience and culturally responsive, trauma-sensitive, developmentally appropriate practice. Through its Love Space® Institute, the agency leverages cutting-edge research on relational health and neuroscience to help organizations co-create mutually nurturing spaces. The team at POINTS OF ACCESS believes that relational health is organizational wealth. Their innovative approach to DEI and bi-directional social emotional™ learning includes transformative capacity building and policy equity alignment.

POINTS OF ACCESS provides whole-person-centered maternal, birth-to-8 bi-directional social-emotional learning™ and neurobiorelational™ reflective practice through the CATT Model of Engagement™ and provider-family-nurturance programs. The agency's new Love Space® store provides capacity-building resources to enable organizations to become solutions-oriented, transformative Thrive Zones™.

Endnotes

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