



A Transformative Vision for the Authentic Inclusion of Family Child Care in Mixed-Delivery PreK Systems

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Executive Summary

Including family child care (FCC) educators in mixed-delivery PreK systems is essential to achieving equity for children, families, educators, and communities. Intentionally (re)designing PreK systems to be more inclusive, equitable, and just can pave the way for transformative change across early care and education (ECE) systems that can result in enhanced outcomes for young children and families. In this document, we offer a set of **guiding principles** and a parallel **conceptual framework** that together highlight: (1) the potential strengths and assets that FCC programs can contribute to enhancing PreK children's developmental outcomes; and (2) the areas of PreK implementation that need to be intentionally designed to successfully engage and support FCC educators as a key component of a mixed-delivery PreK system.

Guiding Principles

Mixed-delivery PreK systems that authentically include FCC programs:

1. Recognize that high-quality PreK occurs in FCC, whether it receives public funding or not
2. Value and learn from FCC strengths and assets
3. Intentionally design resources, standards, and compensation structures for the FCC context
4. Preserve continuity of care, infant and toddler care, and the broader birth-to-five system
5. Make equity and justice top priorities for FCC educators, many of whom face inequities due to racism and sexism

Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework draws on these principles to illustrate:

- The **potential benefits of PreK in FCC** for children, families, and communities (the inner circle)
 - Continuity and stability
 - Culturally and linguistically responsive care
 - Individualized care and education
 - Fostering community connections and development
 - Flexibility and family support
- **Supportive and educator-led infrastructure** such as family child care networks, hubs, or dedicated district staff play a central role in bridging FCC settings and PreK system policies to support implementation (the arrows)
- **Five core implementation areas** are necessary to successfully integrate FCC into PreK systems (the colors on the wheel)
 - Equitable funding and compensation
 - Accessible qualifications and professional development
 - FCC-specific PreK program quality standards
 - Comprehensive services for children and families
 - Streamlined data and monitoring requirements
- **Alignment and cohesion** across early care and education systems that are essential to assist FCC in effectively participating in PreK systems. The circle outlining the five areas of implementation represents alignment and cohesion across the multiple systems that intersect to ensure the delivery of high quality PreK.
- The framework’s location within the **broader birth-to-five ECE system context**, as well as a **sociocultural context** that acknowledges the historical devaluing of women and especially women of color who make up the ECE workforce.



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Background and Policy Context

Early care and education (ECE), and particularly PreK, is often framed as a solution to reducing disparities¹ caused by income inequality and structural racism that emerge early and grow over the lifespan. The United States continues to grapple with systemic inequities in health, wealth, education, and more that are exacerbated by the continued impacts of a global pandemic, climate change, global warfare, and pernicious structural racism. However, the ECE sector has not been spared from needing to address the ways historical and contemporary societal factors have shaped existing early childhood programs, policies, and norms,

Box 1

An equity-centered ECE system includes:

- (a) Ensuring that all children and families have access to high-quality ECE and that access is not determined by their social identity, including their race, place, and class.
- (b) Valuing the diversity, strengths, and assets of all ECE settings, programs, and educators.
- (c) Meeting the holistic needs of children and families.
- (d) Uprooting and transforming historical and contemporary racism, sexism, and classism that continue to influence the contemporary ECE landscape.

which perpetuate injustice for culturally and linguistically diverse children, families, and early childhood educators. There is an urgent need across the ECE sector to ensure that the holistic needs of children, families, and the workforce are met.

The Biden Administration's 2021 Executive Order on [Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#), along with the proposed but unfulfilled promise of the [American Families Plan](#), created opportunities to promote discussion of more **equity-centered ECE systems** (defined in Box 1), including PreK. In this context, it is essential to

affirm that family child care (FCC) educators, many of whom are women of color and care for historically marginalized children and families,² are capable of offering high-quality PreK education, and to re-envision our ECE systems in ways that authentically include FCC programs. Redesigning mixed-delivery PreK systems that consider the collective assets of schools, centers, *and* FCCs has the potential to transform child and family outcomes and promote educational justice in the early years.

Nearly all public PreK programs in the United States employ mixed-delivery models (i.e., at least some PreK is delivered outside of public schools).³ (See box 2.) While about half of these programs theoretically allow FCC programs to receive PreK dollars, limited data or research is available about their design, implementation, or impact.⁴ The opportunity to center equity in ECE system design and meet the demands

required to shore up robust, mixed-delivery PreK systems necessitates authentic inclusion and investment in FCC programs alongside schools and community-based child care and Head Start centers.⁵

Our framework aims to engage PreK administrators, policymakers, advocates, and researchers who seek to include FCC programs in the design, implementation, and evaluation of mixed-delivery PreK systems. This document frames an ambitious vision for what a new era of truly universal, equitable PreK might look like as well as offers guidance for future research on the integration of FCC programs into PreK systems.

Moreover, the continuing reverberating effects of COVID-19 on children, families, and the early childhood sector must be met with comprehensive, holistic, and equitable frameworks and policies.

With these goals in mind, we offer a set of principles and a parallel conceptual framework that highlight: **(1) the potential strengths and assets that FCC programs can contribute to enhancing PreK children’s developmental and learning outcomes;** and **(2) the areas of PreK implementation that need to be intentionally designed to successfully engage and support FCC educators in a mixed-delivery PreK system.**

Guiding Principles

1. Authentic mixed-delivery PreK systems recognize that high-quality preschool teaching occurs every day in FCC programs, regardless of whether or not they currently receive public PreK dollars.

With support and resources, high-quality FCC, similar to high-quality centers or school-based programs, can amplify, boost, and/or increase delivery of positive outcomes for children and families.⁶ FCC is also often preferred by families who live in rural areas, families from marginalized communities, and families who work non-standard hours.⁷ Yet, for far too long, the structures, standards, processes, supports, and compensation systems in early childhood education have made school- and center-based classrooms the norm for high-quality PreK, to the detriment of home-based FCC programs. These standards and processes are often based on white-normative and middle-class values, neglecting the strengths of home-based settings and the cultural assets and knowledge that FCCs draw on to prepare children to thrive in school and in life.⁸ PreK systems that include FCC also have the potential to increase families’

Box 2

Publicly-funded PreK in this brief includes targeted or universal preschool or prekindergarten programs for 3- and/or 4-year-old children. As defined by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), state PreK programs are distinct from, but may be coordinated and integrated with, the child care subsidy system, and/or may be a part of a broader birth-to-five early childhood system. Public PreK funding streams can include both state and local (i.e., city or county) PreK programs.

Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., Jost, T. M. (2022). The State of Preschool 2021: State Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. <https://nieer.org/state-preschool-yearbooks-yearbook2021>

access to high-quality ECE that is located in families' own communities, that reflects their cultural values and linguistic preferences, and is connected to their broader needs for child care (e.g., full day, full year, neighborhood care). As PreK systems expand to serve more 3- and 4-year-olds, it is crucial to design them in ways that welcome FCCs and honor their current role in families' lives and children's developmental trajectories.

2. Authentic mixed-delivery PreK systems value and learn from FCC strengths and promote FCC as a visible and essential component of ECE, broadening access to PreK for families living in marginalized communities. Research on the benefits of FCC programs for children and families lags behind the decades of research on school and center-based PreK. Yet evidence from descriptive and qualitative research and perspectives from practitioners indicate that FCC strengths and assets come from aspects of the small-group, home-based setting (described in more detail in the next section)⁹ which affords individualized care and education for children alongside flexibility and responsiveness to families. Forming lasting, secure attachments with a single caregiver over multiple years is beneficial for children's social-emotional development, particularly for children who have experienced poverty, trauma, racism, or toxic stress. Culturally and linguistically sustaining care and education for both children and families are assets of many FCC programs where the educator shares the same background as enrolled families. In addition, FCC programs are small community-based businesses that have the potential to shape outcomes beyond children and families, including community and economic stability and wellbeing.¹⁰ For all of these reasons, PreK delivery is likely to be strengthened when FCC programs are meaningfully engaged in delivery of PreK services. This is at the core of our conceptual framework.

3. Authentic mixed-delivery PreK systems intentionally design and differentiate resources, standards, and compensation structures that support FCC programs for their strengths and assets in serving children and families. Responsive and educator-driven infrastructure (e.g., networks, hubs, and/or dedicated staff), often best cultivated in local communities, is necessary to engage FCC educators in PreK systems and to facilitate needed supports. Because FCCs do not benefit from the same economies of scale as school districts and centers,¹¹ they need additional and differentiated supports around managing the multiple funding streams and program requirements that delivering PreK requires. This is particularly necessary for educators who face additional barriers to qualification requirements and higher education degree attainment, access to coaching and professional development, and funding because of structural inequities.¹² The design and implementation of PreK systems that include FCC must include consideration of: 1) equitable funding and compensation, including both wages and benefits; 2) accessible qualifications and professional development; 3) FCC-specific PreK program quality standards; 4) comprehensive services for children and families that build on FCC educators' authentic community and family connections; and 5) streamlined data and monitoring requirements (all elaborated below).

- 4. Authentic mixed-delivery PreK systems do not displace continuity of care and the important infant and toddler care that FCCs offer families. PreK systems support the family and community embeddedness of FCC programs, as well as community-based child care centers, as part of a broader birth-to-five care and education ecosystem.** Children’s development occurs over time and within a complex constellation of home, school, and community experiences.¹³ Children grow up in FCC and the multi-age setting allows families to stay with the same program from birth to kindergarten entry, thus increasing the stability and continuity of care. FCC programs are well situated to attend to the developmental and individual needs of children as well as the child care needs of working families.¹⁴ PreK systems that take a developmental rather than an age-based view of care have the potential to support the stability, continuity, and connection that ECE programs, including FCC, offer families and communities. The inclusion of FCC in PreK has the potential to simultaneously strengthen the reach and responsiveness of PreK programs as well as to stabilize the broader birth-to-five early childhood ecosystem by enhancing ECE access and FCC business sustainability.¹⁵
- 5. Authentic mixed-delivery PreK systems make equity and justice a top priority for FCC educators who, like center-based child care educators, face inequities largely due to racism and sexism.** FCC educators are primarily women, including many Black, Latina, and other women of color and are likely to serve racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse children and families. FCC educators of color face intersecting and compounding historical and contemporary inequities due to their race and gender that have depressed their pay and economic stability. Jobs in which women are predominant, including jobs in ECE, are often viewed as invisible and not worthy of pay or even protection as is evidenced by the higher pay and benefits that similar jobs afford when performed by men.¹⁶ Moreover, recent national data find that within the ECE industry, FCC educators’ income is less than center-based teachers who perform similar work.¹⁷ Including FCC educators in PreK systems in ways that increase rather than depress their pay and access to benefits is a racial and economic justice issue. Income from and participation in public PreK has the potential to stabilize the FCC workforce and their businesses, offer new professional and economic pathways, and in particular, redress some of the historical inequities faced by FCC educators of color in the U.S.¹⁸

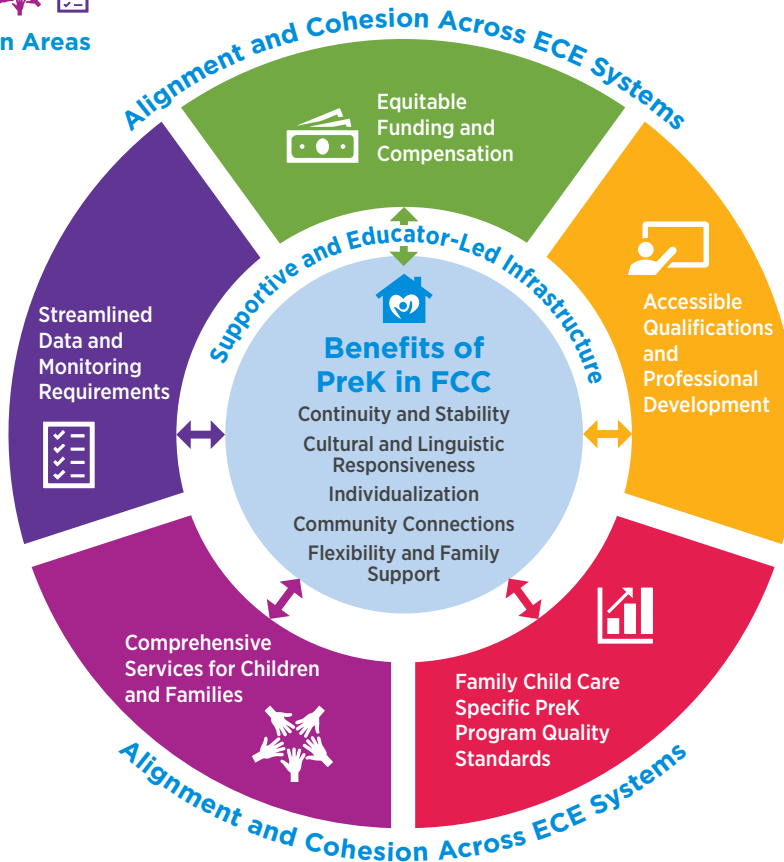
Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework (see figure 1) draws on these guiding principles to illustrate **five core areas of implementation** that are necessary to successfully tailor and (re)design PreK systems with FCC in mind (the colors on the wheel). The **potential benefits of this investment** for children, families, and communities are illustrated in the inner circle. Central to the success of FCC-PreK delivery is the **supportive and educator-led infrastructure** that interfaces with and serves as a bridge to the broader PreK system to ensure appropriateness and intentional differentiation for the FCC context, to support FCC programs throughout the implementation process, and to connect FCC educators to one another and to their communities. These components are described in more detail below.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Including FCC in Mixed-Delivery PreK Systems


Implementation Areas



Birth-to-five ECE systems context: Historically not designed for FCC programs
Sociocultural context: Legacy of structural racism, classism, and sexism

We situate this FCC-PreK framework within the **broader birth-to-five ECE system context**, highlighting that the equitable inclusion of FCC in PreK systems must honor and not destabilize the care FCC programs provide to children of all ages, cultures, and abilities as well as the year-round and often extended-hour care they offer families. We also acknowledge the importance of **systems alignment and cohesion** across the ECE system to promote effective and efficient FCC engagement in PreK systems without creating substantial additional burden for FCC educators. Finally, we acknowledge that ECE systems-building work takes place within a **sociocultural context** that has historically devalued and exploited women and women of color who make up the ECE workforce and many of the families they serve.¹⁹ Intentionally redesigning PreK systems to be more inclusive, equitable, and just can pave the way for transformative changes across ECE systems that result in equitable outcomes for young children and families.

Strengths FCC Programs Can Bring to PreK Systems

At the center of the framework are the potential strengths of FCC programs, identified to emphasize the distinct benefits they afford PreK children and their families in addition to the benefits of PreK in general. FCC educators and the structure and processes of their home-based settings may provide a distinct model for meeting the holistic needs of children and their families.

- **Continuity and stability** have been shown across studies to be key components of high-quality ECE and associated with positive child outcomes,²⁰ although limited research has explored the benefits of this continuity in FCC specifically.
- FCC educators, who often share the same background as families in their programs, are well-positioned to offer **culturally and linguistically responsive care and education** including the transference of cultural knowledge and supports for positive identity development which have been associated with positive outcomes for children.²¹ Furthermore, emergent research on suspension and expulsion in FCC suggests that Black FCC educators are less likely to suspend or expel children from their care, which may have significant implications given that Black children are more likely to be suspended or expelled from center-based settings.²² Some FCC settings may offer spaces for healing and belonging for children and families who experience school or center-based settings as not responsive to their experiences and needs.
- The small group setting of FCC allows for **one-on-one, individualized care and education**, which has been associated with an array of positive child outcomes.²³ Children who may need language, physical, or sensorial supports, for example, are able to get their needs met through small, home-like, personalized settings.
- FCC educators often use their visibility in the community to support broader neighborhood and community well-being through **fostering community connections** for families and children. FCC educators often serve as community brokers, helping families access both formal and informal resources in the community.²⁴
- For families, FCC settings are more likely than center-based or school-based programs to offer **flexibility and family support** including extended and nontraditional hours of care that help families maintain employment²⁵ as well as close relationships with families that help them feel connected and engaged in their own children's development and learning. In addition, FCC educators may offer an array of in-kind supports above and beyond child care including help with transportation, flexible payment schedules, emergency care, clothing and food for children and families, and emotional support for families.²⁶

Supportive and Educator-led Infrastructure

Authentic partnerships with supportive and educator-led infrastructure (e.g., staffed family child care networks or hubs, dedicated agency staff) are needed for FCC educators to see themselves and their assets as a valued part of a PreK system and to successfully offer PreK programming. (see Box 3) Research on FCC participation in other publicly funded systems clearly identifies a range of structural barriers that inhibit

Box 3

Staffed FCC Networks are a promising type of local infrastructure to support PreK implementation. Networks typically offer a menu of supports tailored for FCC professionals at all career stages, including supporting quality improvement, business sustainability, shared services, peer support, and leadership development. Dedicated network staff deeply understand the FCC context and are well positioned to bridge policy and practice in the context of PreK implementation.

meaningful FCC engagement.²⁷ FCC educators must be involved in decision-making from design through implementation and expansion processes. Supportive and educator-led infrastructure serves as a bridge between the PreK system and the FCC educator. Local support entities deeply understand the FCC setting, help design PreK implementation requirements to ensure their appropriateness for the FCC context, and holistically support FCC educators to meet all PreK requirements.

Core Implementation Areas for PreK in FCC Settings

The five core areas of PreK implementation are indicated in the framework by the icons surrounding the FCC program at the center of the graphic. These considerations are drawn from decades of literature on early childhood systems building²⁸ as well as limited descriptive studies of PreK systems that include FCC.²⁹

- **Equitable funding and compensation** point to the actual and true costs of delivering high-quality FCC, including wage parity and access to benefits that support educator well-being. Blended funding honors the continuous, mixed-age nature of FCC programs (i.e., children age in and out of PreK within the same setting).
- **Accessible qualifications and professional development** honor FCC educator strengths and lived experiences and include clear and accessible pathways for attainment. Based on an understanding that differentiated inputs may be necessary to yield consistent outcomes,³⁰ PreK systems may include phase-in time, flexible lattices that make space for FCC educator leadership opportunities, schedules that work for FCC educators, content that is appropriate for the FCC setting, staffing supports, and assistant requirements that acknowledge the home/family setting (i.e., that assistants may be family members).
- **FCC-centered PreK program quality standards** optimize program quality to honor and integrate the value and realities of FCC (e.g., staffing, children and families served, home-based setting). FCC-specific standards are built on the unique assets of FCC and are designed to strengthen and highlight implementation of PreK (e.g., curriculum, qualifications).

- FCC educator understanding and rootedness in their communities is leveraged in delivering **comprehensive services for children and families**³¹ (i.e., delivering or referring to health, vision, dental, or early intervention services aligned with Head Start Performance Standards), but also continuing to support children in families in informal and relationship-based ways.³²
- **Streamlined data and monitoring requirements** are reasonable for FCC educators to accomplish and are reciprocal with other elements of the birth-to-five system (i.e., single data tracking platform, limited number of visitors).

Alignment and Cohesion Across ECE Systems

Encompassing the five implementation areas are alignment and cohesion across ECE systems which are necessary for effective FCC participation in PreK systems. Because high-quality PreK is embedded in the complex ECE systems landscape, it is important for multiple systems (e.g., child care subsidy, child care licensing, professional development, Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, early childhood mental health, early intervention, Child and Adult Care Food Program) to be aligned in ways that allow effective and efficient FCC engagement to ensure high-quality practices. Standards, policies, and practices on issues such as monitoring and provision of technical assistance and supports should be coordinated in ways that ensure quality yet reduce burden for FCC programs.

The conceptual framework presented in this brief and accompanying core principles for implementation of PreK in FCC settings were developed to stimulate discussions about building more equitable mixed-delivery ECE systems as well as to guide future research, program implementation, and policy development. As momentum builds around the essential infrastructure role that ECE plays in the lives of families, communities, organizations, and businesses, it is critical for FCC settings to be considered and involved in dialogue and policy design about expanding and building ECE systems and programs that are equitable, high quality, and accessible for all young children. PreK systems, arguably, often represent the highest quality ECE in a state or region. Including FCC settings as key partners in these systems is a crucial step in ensuring that all preschool children have access to high-quality, responsive, and accessible educational opportunities.

Endnotes

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About the Partners

Home-Based Child Care Research at Erikson Institute's Herr Research Center

Erikson Institute educates, inspires, and promotes leadership to serve the needs of children and families. As part of that mission, the Herr Research Center develops original scholarship and research that shapes the early childhood field. Since 2008, the Home-Based Child Care (HBCC) Research focus area has conducted rigorous and actionable research to inform early care and education policy and program design and decision-making. Through national, multi-state, and local projects and participatory approaches, Erikson's HBCC Research group partners with professionals and communities to highlight promising strategies for supporting equity for the home-based child care workforce and quality for children and families who use home-based child care.

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 and other children of color prenatally 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 all its consequences on the lives of Black children, families, and communities and other children and families from marginalized communities, and to ensure their optimal health, wealth, and well-being.

Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood

The Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC) at the University of Delaware strives to improve the quality of early care and education throughout the state of Delaware and beyond by providing exemplary professional development and program-level supports to all sectors of the early care and education community. DIEEC conducts policy-relevant research that helps to advance equity, promote the early childhood workforce, and enhance the lives of young children and their families.

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