



## Black Lives Matter: Statement by the Early Learning Action Alliance

As a coalition of over sixty organizations from across Washington, the Early Learning Action Alliance (ELAA) affirms that Black Lives Matter - Black lives are valuable, they are beloved, and they are sacred. We offer our collective solidarity, our outrage, and our advocacy to Black communities grieving the murder of George Floyd and countless African Americans who have been victims of racist police violence. We call out the ongoing devaluation of Black lives in our governmental systems, including education, and the lack of adequate progress in addressing centuries of Black devaluation. We commit to ensuring that our work is a tangible contribution to the struggle for racial justice.

Our [founding principles](#) as a coalition over a decade ago identified institutional and structural racism as the root causes of disparities in achieving our shared objective: high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive early learning. We know we will not be successful in achieving this objective and creating equitable access to high quality early learning without paying explicit attention to the needs of Black families, educators and child care professionals serving Black babies, toddlers and preschool-aged children.

We also call out and recognize that many of the advancements in early childhood development are thanks to Black leaders - from the child care programs of the Black Panther Party to the advocacy of Black feminists in the Women's Equality Movement. At the same time, our efforts must acknowledge that Black women in particular have cared for our country's children for centuries - first as enslaved people and then employed as low-pay workers. The systemic underinvestment in child care as a whole is seeded in the racist devaluation of the labor of Black women, and continues to uphold white supremacist structures through poverty wages for providers. Our early learning system has repeatedly also failed to serve and value Black children, illustrated most prominently by the high rate of suspensions and expulsions for black boys that starts the school-to-prison pipeline as early as preschool and child care settings.

As a coalition, we also call out the murder of Charleena Lyles, just three years ago in Seattle. The death of this mother of four young children - who was pregnant when she was killed by Seattle Police officers - is just one example of the devastating impact of police brutality on Black children. As a coalition of leaders and communities lifting up early learning, we call out Charleena Lyles' murder and the impact on her family and children as an assault on all of us. We also recognize the many other Black lives in Washington that have been taken from us due to police brutality and due to anti-Black racism, including other deaths of parents witnessed by their children.

In a country burdened by centuries of racism targeted at the decimation of Black people, building an early learning system that affirms the inherent dignity and value of every child must necessarily be an anti-racist undertaking and an affirmatively pro-Black lives undertaking. Our youngest children deserve, and simply must get, a pro-Black affirmation from our entire society.

Yet, as a coalition with a large representation of white advocates and white-led organizations, too often our principles, notwithstanding our stated intent to focus on racial equity, have not been upheld in our work. We acknowledge the harm that has been done to our Black community members and partners in particular, and we take this moment to recommit ourselves as a coalition to examining and undoing the manifestations of racism and anti-blackness within our own coalition. We also collectively re-commit our organizations, our advocacy efforts, and ourselves to taking proactive and tangible steps towards significantly greater progress than we have achieved to date. We make this commitment collectively on behalf of our Black colleagues, Black early learning providers, Black parents, and all Black children. Many of us are white allies who are humbled to do personal work as we seek to understand how we can change and how we can contribute to valuing Black lives.

As members of the Early Learning Action Alliance, we must be accountable to children, families, and providers who are directly impacted by our shared work. Children and families of color are disproportionately represented in the programs we advocate for and yet they are visibly shut out from coalition decision making. We acknowledge that white advocates cannot presume to speak for Black families without meaningful partnership, and without redistributing power, resources, and control in the ways that we establish our priorities, how we work collectively, and what system changes need to occur to value Black lives.

The Early Learning Action Alliance commits to identifying, addressing, and changing these and other dynamics that promote paternalism and tokenism, cause harm to Black people who participate in the coalition, and ultimately contribute to white supremacy in early learning structures, policies and programs. We commit to reviewing and analyzing coalition membership, structures, and operations to assure that our coalition both affirmatively values Black leadership and voices, and also does not marginalize or devalue Black lives. We also commit to reviewing our racial equity screening tools to ensure our policy development, strategy, and mobilization efforts are guided and led by families and providers. The Early Learning Action Alliance also commits to holding space and time for trust building within our coalition, and racial identity caucuses where Black people and people of color can have ongoing healing conversations and white people can hold one another accountable for moving this Statement and its subsequent action items from talk to impactful implementation.

We also commit to using our platform and power to urge the systems and institutions within which we advocate to center the voices of Black communities. We call on our leaders and partners such as the Washington State Legislature, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, the Governor, and others, including the private sector, to establish plans of action with specific accountability metrics to directly center impacted Black communities in policy and program development and implementation. We also call out the importance of data that is disaggregated by race to inform the specific needs of communities of color and the manifestations of anti-blackness in our systems, and call for systems surrounding early learning to value Black lives by collecting, understanding and utilizing data that reflects the needs of Black children and communities, including qualitative data. We commit to advocating for the necessary approaches to data collection, utilization and dissemination, and to strengthening our coalition use of data reflecting the value of Black lives.

Anti-racist work happens in community and we invite you to take part in ours. There is perhaps no better place to start than with early learning. The early learners of today are the adults of the future. Please contact [ELAA@childrensalliance.org](mailto:ELAA@childrensalliance.org) to continue this conversation with Early Learning Action Alliance staff members and leaders.

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