

CAMBRIDGE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD NEWSLETTER

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CAMBRIDGE Office of Early Childhood

The mission of the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood is to **connect** the city's early childhood ecosystem, **align** early childhood services and information, and **advocate** for and **advance** the needs of all young children, their families, and the early childhood workforce.

The Cambridge Office of Early Childhood is a collaboration supported by the **City of Cambridge** and **Cambridge Public Schools**.



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A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DR. CHERYL OHLSON

Dear Cambridge Early Childhood Community,

As we enter the month of October I hope that you, your staff, children, and families have successfully settled into the new school year.

After our summer hiatus, we are pleased to resume distribution of our OEC Newsletter, and we're excited to announce some new changes! This year we have decided to make three significant changes to the newsletter:

Clarifying the Primary Audience and Purpose of the Newsletter

Based on feedback from our providers, the newsletter will serve as a platform for early childhood providers across the city to share their ideas, experiences, and insights with each other. Designed as a "learning hub," the newsletter will deepen understanding of key topics, highlight best practices, and foster peer-to-peer learning. Through this new format, we aim to strengthen the sense of community and "togetherness" among providers, helping to build a more collaborative and supportive early childhood network citywide.

Narrowing the Focus of the Newsletter

This year, we've chosen to prioritize depth over breadth by focusing the newsletter on two key and interconnected topics: Children's Behavioral Health and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and Family Engagement. By centering our content on these areas, we aim to support deeper learning and more meaningful conversations around these critical aspects of early childhood education. On the next page, you'll find more detail about why these topics were selected as our focus for the year.

Elevating Provider Voices in the Newsletter

One of the changes we're most excited about this year is inviting and highlighting contributions directly from you! As I and other OEC staff visit programs across the city, it's clear that there is so much creativity and expertise within our provider community. From effective strategies and practices you've implemented, to lessons learned and helpful resources you've discovered or created — there is so much to share and learn from each other.

This newsletter is designed to keep you **informed, inspired, and connected**. We hope it will serve as a platform to showcase your incredible work and to help providers learn from one another. If you're interested in sharing something related to behavioral health, social-emotional learning (SEL), or family engagement, please don't hesitate to reach out. And when we contact you to ask if you'd be willing to contribute — we hope you'll say "yes"!

As always, we appreciate your feedback and your partnership as we work to support you and the young children, families, and educators of Cambridge!

In partnership,

Cheryl Ohlson

Dr. Cheryl Ohlson

Focus Topics

WHY ARE WE FOCUSING ON CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH, SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING, AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT THIS YEAR?

As many of you are aware, OEC has been looking very closely at behavioral health and has been working to identify ways that our office can support early childhood providers in promoting the development of children's social emotional skills and healthy behavioral development. Like so many cities and towns across the country, many early childhood centers in Cambridge have reported that they have struggled to effectively manage the social, emotional and behavioral needs of children, especially since the pandemic. Some children across the city have experienced exclusionary discipline practices, including suspension and expulsion, as a result of challenging behaviors.

We know from the work of Dr. Walter Gilliam and others that very young children are much more likely than children in the K-12 grades to be suspended or expelled from school, and we also know that suspension and expulsion at the preschool level can have profound effects on children and their families. When young children are excluded from childcare or preschool through the use of exclusionary practices, they are denied access to valuable learning opportunities that are designed to set them up for success in kindergarten and beyond. Children who are suspended or expelled from preschool and their families may face a host of negative, and sometimes long-term, consequences, including a higher likelihood of academic challenges, ongoing behavioral challenges, and the development of a negative sense of self and negative attitudes about school. Families experience increased stress and possible impacts on their employment and income as they lose access to childcare.

Research also shows that as early childhood educators, we have the opportunity to work closely with families to have a significant positive impact on children's social emotional

What do exclusionary discipline practices look like in early childhood settings?

Examples of exclusionary practices in early childhood



In-School Suspension could look like...

Disciplining a child by sending the child out of the classroom, such as to the director's office.



Out-of-School Suspension could look like...

Asking a family to pick up their child early because of behavioral issues (e.g., biting, hitting, not following directions).



Expulsion could look like...

Telling a family that they will need to find another care arrangement/center because the child is not a "good fit" for the program or that the program can 'no longer support' their toddler or preschooler.



'Soft' Expulsion could look like...

Asking the family repeatedly to pick their child up early because of behavior issues, requiring them to leave or miss work frequently.

Image From preventexpulsion.org/overview/

development and learning, which can in turn equip children to successfully manage and navigate complex emotions and social situations and to thrive in school and elsewhere. During the toddler and preschool years, children are beginning to explore and manage their emotions and to develop the skills that will enable them to express their thoughts and feelings; to develop friendships; to navigate and solve challenging social situations; and so much more. The development of social emotional skills is key to helping young children develop important skills such as empathy, self-regulation, and cooperation. By supporting SEL early through effective classroom practices and family engagement strategies, we are giving young learners the tools they need to thrive both inside and outside the classroom.

(continued on next page)

Focus Topics

We look forward to continuing this conversation with our early childhood colleagues across the city, and to learning from each other about the strategies and resources that you all have found to

be effective in promoting children's social emotional learning and healthy behavioral development. We're excited to dig into these important topics this year!

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR

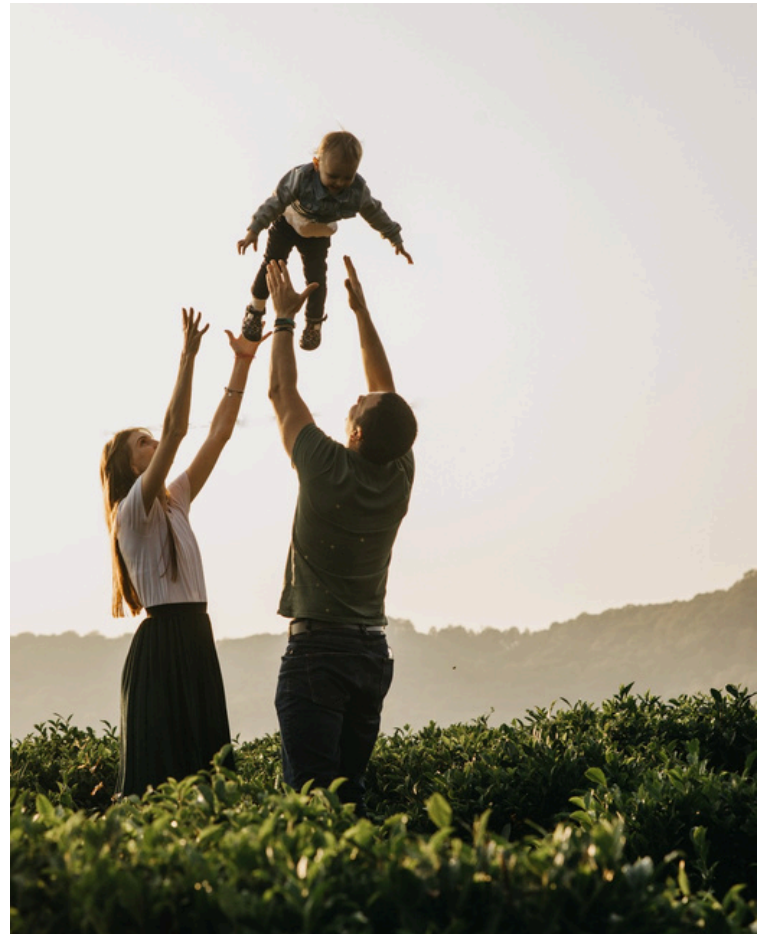
By Megan Postal

Family engagement is a cornerstone of a high-quality preschool program. During the 25-26 school year, OEC will be sharing key practices for Family Engagement within CPP.

[Strengthening Partnerships: A Framework for Prenatal through Young Adulthood Family Engagement in Massachusetts](#)

is a great resource for CPP Providers.

To launch the school year, we would like to highlight building positive relationships with families. Here's a handout for educators and administrators to learn more. At this point in the year one important area to focus on is bidirectional communication with families. The goal for educators, and the program, is to identify the best way to connect with each unique family.



This connection is about encouraging sharing information family to teacher and teacher to family. Some strategies are:

- Home visits
- Communication systems with a notebook, an app or some other way
- Photos of every family in the classroom
- An open-door policy so that families can drop in whenever they want
- Offering opportunities for families to participate - volunteering in the classroom, sharing stories with the class, going on a field trip or preparing materials

From The Field

HOW PROGRAMS CAN USE MYSEL TO STRENGTHEN TIER ONE PRACTICES

By Dr. Christina Denis

MySEL is an iOS App that is designed to assess educator skills in supporting children's social and emotional learning. This tool, based on the Pyramid Model, was designed to help educators better understand all the different components that make up social and emotional learning, assess the fidelity of the use of these skills and provide reflection opportunities as to where support might be most needed. The overarching goal here is to prevent challenging behaviors in the classroom and to help educators be better equipped with effective strategies when challenges do occur/arise.

The scope of social and emotional learning is so large that it is often overwhelming to know where to start or focus when thinking about developing effective strategies. MySEL provides a targeted way to identify where educators feel they need more support to fill in the gaps of where they might not be providing children enough guidance. While MySEL covers all tiers of the Pyramid Model, the focus is on Tier 1 supports. Here are some key reasons why Tier 1 is so important:

Universal Benefits: Tier 1 provides universal supports for all children, establishing the necessary base for healthy social-emotional development.

Proactive Approach: It serves as a preventative measure, teaching social and emotional skills to children so they can develop competence rather than engaging in challenging behaviors.

Foundation for Other Tiers: A strong Tier 1 foundation is essential for the effectiveness of higher tiers (Tier 2 and Tier 3). Without it, the entire system of tiered supports cannot function properly.

Nurturing Relationships: This tier emphasizes the importance of responsive and nurturing caregiving relationships between children and adults, fostering secure attachments that are pivotal to development.

Supportive Environments: Tier 1 includes creating high-quality, inclusive, and positive learning environments that support a child's social-emotional needs and are inclusive of family partnerships.

Reduced Need for Intervention: By providing robust universal supports, Tier 1 can address a significant portion of challenging behaviors and reduce the number of children who need more intensive interventions.

Evidence-Based Framework: The Pyramid Model provides an evidence-based framework for early childhood programs to nurture the social-emotional development of all children.

The data generated from the MySEL app allows administrators to make data-based decisions on how they support their education teams in building these valuable skills for children. The data can also provide guidance on pedagogical goal setting, how to design targeted professional development opportunities as well as ensuring that the social and emotional supports in place are aligned with programs philosophy and mission. Having Tier 1 supports that are being used effectively and to fidelity are the best way to prevent challenging behaviors, assist children in building valuable pro-social skills and create opportunities to work together with families.



MySEL: The Social Emotional Learning Self-Reflection App

To get started, scan the QR code to download the MySEL Webinar

Questions? Reach us @ cdenis@mysel.org



From The Field

THE EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE FOUNDATION

Pyramid Model



The "Effective workforce" in the Pyramid Model is the foundational base of this framework, consisting of early childhood providers, administrators, and other stakeholders who are trained, supported, and equipped with the knowledge to implement evidence-based practices that promote social-emotional development in young children. Resources for this foundational tier include professional development, coaching, support for family engagement, and systemic policies that foster well-trained staff capable of making data-driven decisions to support children's positive behavior and social-emotional competence.

COMPONENTS OF THE EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE:

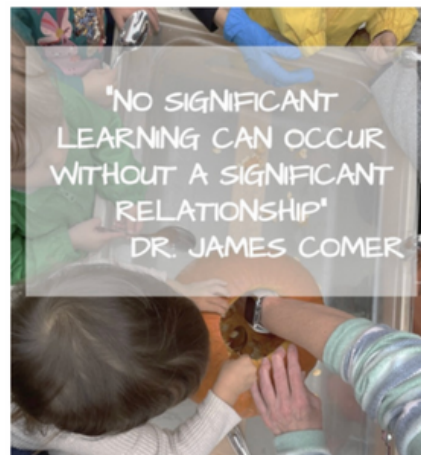
Systemic Support and Policies:	Well-defined administrative procedures and policies are in place to support the workforce and ensure the consistent use of evidence-based practices.
Professional Development and Coaching:	Teachers, staff, and families receive ongoing training, coaching, and technical assistance to build their capacity in implementing the Pyramid Model
Family Engagement:	Collaborative partnerships with families are established to provide them with information and support in guiding their children's social-emotional development.
Data-Driven Decision-Making:	The workforce is trained to collect and use child and family data to make informed decisions about interventions and support
Knowledge of Social-Emotional Development:	Professionals have a strong understanding of infant mental health and how early interactions influence children's social and emotional skills.

[Want to learn more about the Pyramid Model?](#)

Strong Start offers access to a free module with foundational Pyramid Model Practices [here](#).

CREATING A YES! ENVIRONMENT: SUPPORTING CREATIVITY AND EXPLORATION | [NAEYC ARTICLE](#)

A "Yes environment" invites children to explore with independence and autonomy and diminishes frustration and stress for both children and adults. It doesn't mean never saying "no" or not setting boundaries, just reserving those for when needed due to safety or guidance. This article provides some great strategies for intentionally creating a "Yes environment."



Cambridge Preschool Program Updates



The Cambridge Preschool Program

is a publicly-funded program that provides

access to free, high-quality early education and care

for all Cambridge 4 year-olds and some 3 year-olds for a

school-day, school-year

placement. There are additional costs for

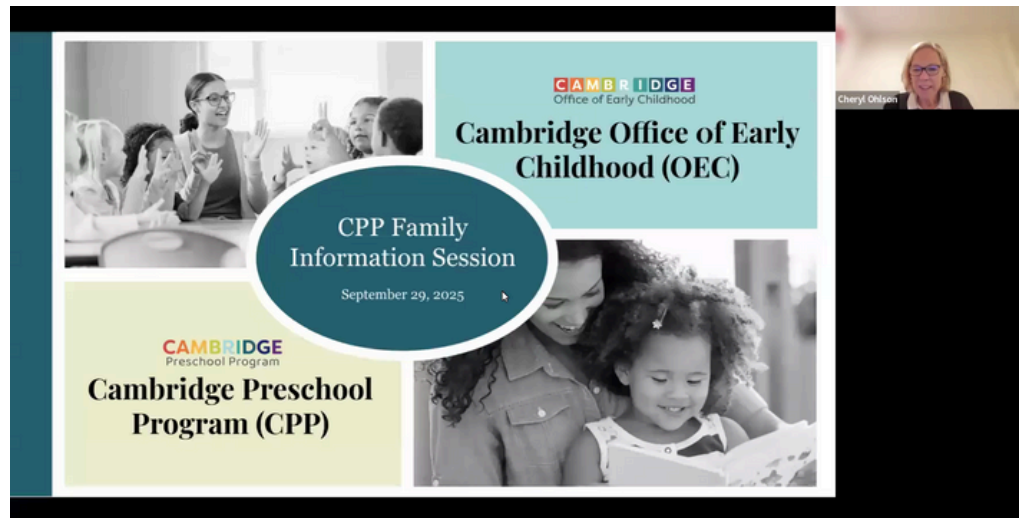
full-day, full-year

(including summer) programs for some families. Families apply to CPP through a

single, centralized online application.

Cambridge Preschool Program Application

The Cambridge Preschool Program Application for the 2026-2027 school year is open!



[Click HERE to watch the 2025 CPP Webinar](#)

The Fall application window for CPP enrollment for the 2026–2027 school year will be open from **October 1 to November 14, 2025**. Children are eligible to apply if they are Cambridge residents and will be either **4 years old or 3 years old by August 31, 2026**.

- Families are encouraged to use the CPP Search Tool to review our provider profiles prior to the application process for general information including locations, hours, and more.
- For a quick search tool tutorial, click the video in the CPP Provider section of the CPP website!
- Families interested in applying for a CPP spot should complete their application by **November 14th**.
- Families will be notified of their match results in **January 2026**.

For more information on the Cambridge Preschool Program please visit the [CPP website](#).

News & Notices

Cambridge Preschool Program & Kindergarten Transition Impact This Summer

Summer at the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood means helping families get ready for CPP and Kindergarten. Here's a quick look at our impact this summer:

- **1,531** CPP and Kindergarten Welcome Packets sent to children and families
- **142** Boston Children's Museum passes claimed by incoming Kindergarten Families
- **227** Transition Forms completed by Pre-K teachers and submitted to Kindergarten teachers



Virtual Coaching Hours

Virtual Coaching hours is dedicated time for educators and supportive staff (curriculum specialists, coaches, etc) to connect with OEC coaches, focused on classroom practices support. Educators can join an open Zoom to discuss topics of interest/need with coaches, either one on one or in small groups.

[Click this link to sign up!](#)

Professional Learning Communities & Communities of Practice

[View Professional Learning Communities \(PLC\) Opportunities Here](#)

[View Communities of Practice \(COP\) Opportunities Here](#)



Image: Educators at a PLC on bringing natural materials into the classroom.

News & Notices

Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL)



Every year, National School Lunch Week (NSLW) is celebrated on the second full week of October. Created by President John F. Kennedy in 1962, the NSLW was designed to bring awareness on the benefit of healthy lunches for children in their development both in and outside of school.

This year's theme - NSLW25: Taste the World – Your School Lunch Passport! The School Nutrition Association (SNA) has downloadable elements/images, colorful images of food from around the world, to help support celebrating this week in your school!

For more information on school meals, including school breakfast, see here from the Food Research and Action Center.

More tips for nutrition and staying active are available on the resources page at the Cambridge Public Health Department website.

Contact Norah Ismail, Public Health Nutritionist, at nismail@cambridgepublichealth.org with questions or interest in this or other healthy eating active living projects.



Looking for activities and resources for you and your family?

Use Find It Cambridge to search for childcare, housing, health services, free events & more!

Visit www.finditcambridge.org ■ Call or text 617.686.2998 ■ Email info@finditcambridge.org

Need help searching?

Call, text, or email Andrew. He can help you find what you are looking for.

News & Notices

The Cambridge Public Health Department will be offering fall vaccine clinics starting in October! Flu and Covid-19 vaccines will be offered. Our website lists current dates and locations for public clinics, however there may be additional dates that get added. For updates, please visit our website at the <https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/>

2025 Cambridge Public Health Flu and COVID Vaccine Clinics

Everyone 6 months and older can get flu and COVID vaccines this fall. Register online. Bring your insurance card if you have one. These vaccines are especially important for people who are aged 65 and over, people at risk for serious illness (chronic conditions, immunocompromised), and young children.

Tuesday
Oct. 21
Senior Center
806 Mass Ave
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday
Oct. 29
Reservoir Church
170 Rindge Ave 3:30
p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Thursday
Oct. 23
King Open School
850 Cambridge St
4:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

(Includes VaxAbilities for individuals with special needs)

Thursday
Oct. 30
Pisani Center
131 Washington St
4:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Friday
Oct. 24
**Cambridge
Community Center**
5 Callender St
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

To Register:



Cambridge
Public Health
Department

[cambridgepublichealth.org](https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org)

Questions?

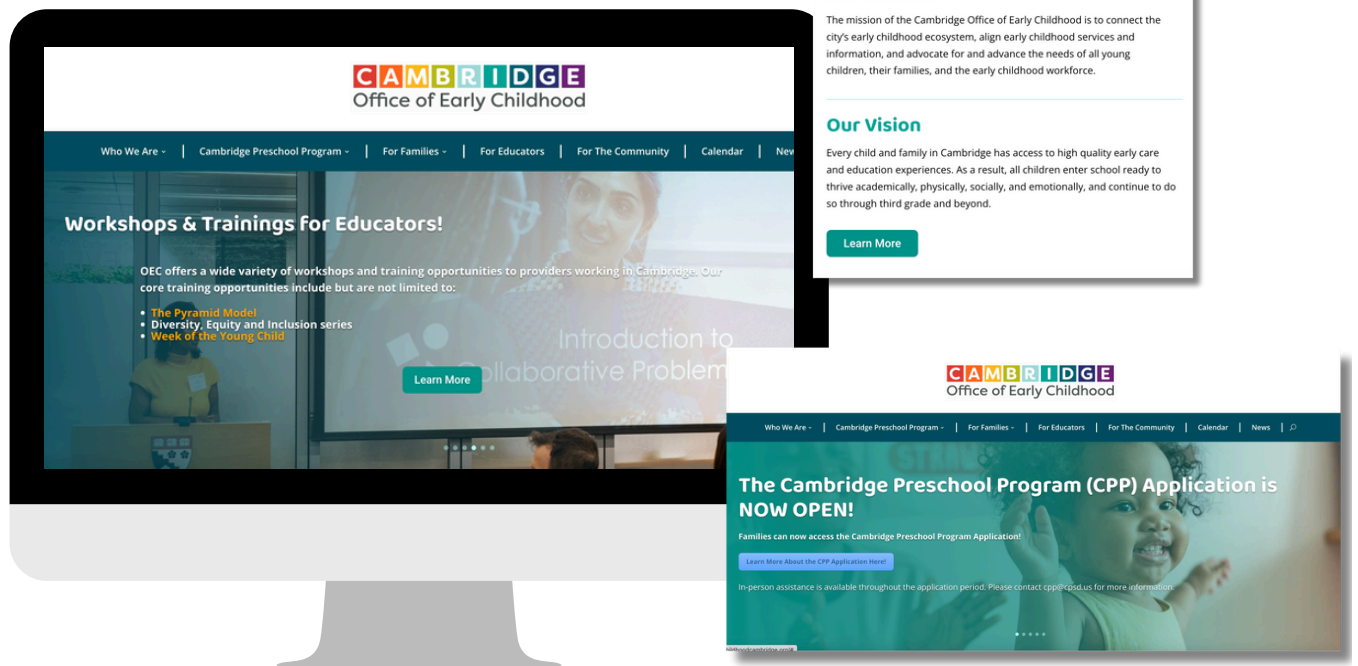
[cambridgepublichealth.org/get-vaccinated](https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/get-vaccinated)
(617) 947-6481

Cambridge Office of Early Childhood

OEC WEBSITE

**Need information on all things Early Childhood in Cambridge?
Visit the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood website!**

www.earlychildhoodcambridge.org



What Information Can I Learn From The OEC Website?

www.earlychildhoodcambridge.org is a one-stop-shop for the Cambridge community to access information and resources related to early childhood education and programs. The new website culminates a rebranding process for the Office of Early Childhood, formerly known as the Cambridge Birth to 3rd Grade Partnership.

The website includes but is not limited to:

- About Us & Contacts
- Announcements & Events
- The Cambridge Preschool Program
- Career Pathways
- Child Care Resources
- COEC Contact Information
- Collaborating Organizations
- CPS Programs
- Early Learning & School Readiness
- Educator Resources
- Paying For Childcare
- Preschool Scholarships
- Professional Development
- Program Quality Improvement
- Publications
- Research & Evaluation
- Workshops & Trainings

Cambridge Office of Early Childhood

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Cambridge Office of Early Childhood

ABOUT US

The Cambridge Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is a collaborative office whose work and team are shared jointly by the City of Cambridge and Cambridge Public Schools.

Our Mission

The mission of the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is to **connect** the city's early childhood ecosystem, **align** early childhood services and information, and **advocate** for and **advance** the needs of all young children, their families, and the early childhood workforce.

Our Vision

Every child and family in Cambridge has access to high-quality early care and education experiences. As a result, all children enter school ready to thrive academically, physically, socially, and emotionally, and continue to do so through third grade and beyond.

Our Commitment To Equity

All children have the right to equitable early childhood experiences that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, all early childhood educators and family support staff have a professional obligation to advance equity. They can do this best when they are effectively supported by the settings in which they work and when they and their wider communities embrace diversity and full inclusion as strengths, uphold fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable opportunities for children and their families. ([Adapted from NAEYC's Position Statement on Advancing Equity](#))

CAMBRIDGE
Office of Early Childhood

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