

# *Social Equity* LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE



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## Education

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### ***An Analysis of the Feasibility of a Universal Early Childhood Education System***

**Wednesday 2:45 pm; Panel 1**

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**Abstract:** Early childhood education (ECE) programs in the U.S. are limited and inequitable; many are unlicensed. These inadequacies strain family and community capacity and negatively affect educational performance. Previous research has not explored fully the structure and administration of ECE, nor the possibility of developing a strong universal system to serve all children under 5 years old. The purpose of the study was to define ECE policy, evaluate its infrastructure, and determine the feasibility of implementing universal ECE. The conceptual framework was based upon Dewey's theories of education and democracy; Goodlad's Agenda for Education in a Democracy reinforced the argument for universal ECE. The French école maternelle universal preschool system presented a national model for study. Research questions focused on the disparities and strengths in current early childhood education policy and the feasibility of developing a federally funded, universal ECE system. This qualitative, exploratory case study gathered data from semi-structured interviews with three directors of ECE government and nonprofit organizations, as well as review of national policy and program documents. Data analysis followed a process of developing research memos that were derived from open, substantive, and theoretical coding; the constant comparative method; pattern matching; and conceptual groupings. Findings included the identification of gaps between current and necessary ECE policies and programs, the redesign that is needed, obstacles to redesigning the ECE system, and resources required to implement a federally funded, universally accessible ECE program. The implications for social change include the improvement of ECE programs to increase educational performance in the U.S., benefit families, and strengthen community capacity and economies.