Straus Institute for Thriving Children & Families

The Straus Institute for Thriving Children & Families brings together research, practice, and policy to help build a more equitable society for children, families, and the communities in which they live and learn. Grounded in rigorous data and policy analysis, the institute conducts applied research that informs real-world solutions that help children and families thrive. By translating our findings for communities, advocates, and policymakers, the institute promotes healthy child development, economic stability for families, and a well-prepared and fairly compensated early childhood workforce.

Our Approach

Through our work, we gather and analyze quantitative and qualitative data, identify policy trends, and synthesize and document findings and recommendations on key issues impacting early childhood development and education. By working closely with research partners who can influence policy and practice to help meaningfully address systemic inequities and promote healthy child development, our applied studies inform real-world practice and offer tools and resources to support change implementation.

The institute includes the National Center for Children in Poverty, which works to advance family-oriented policies and strategic use of public resources to support the economic security, healthy development, and well-being of America's next generation.

Our Work

Key initiatives focus on supporting the development of evidence-based and equity-informed policies and programs that benefit young children and families, especially those facing the effects of poverty, racism, and other forms of social injustice. Our work includes:

- **Strengthening publicly supported early childhood systems** by partnering with states to understand how to expand child care options to better serve children, families, and providers, including a current implementation study of New York City's new 2-K program and a recent study of Vermont's Act 76, which expanded eligibility for child care subsidies, demonstrating the successes of large-scale public investments in free or subsidized child care programs
- **Supporting economic security for families** by leading research and building resources to advance family stability, focusing on economic supports to help reduce financial strain on low-income households, including a recent 50-state analysis of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families as well as an examination of trends in Women, Infants, and Children program participation and potential reasons for a decline
- **Expanding the early childhood workforce** by building collaborative professional development models and specialized higher education microcredentials to help support high-quality early care, including developing a program for Latina educators to gain a Spanish-language early childhood education credential and completing an analysis of the National Survey of Early Care and Education to demonstrate ongoing challenges around health insurance coverage for early childhood workers
- **Convening thought leadership in early childhood education** by gathering national, state, and city leaders, advocates, practitioners, and researchers to advance a vision for public supports for child care, including a recent convening focused on New York City's 2-K program that highlighted the importance of relationships, adequate funding, and high-quality educator pathways
- **Building mental health infrastructure to support young children** by conducting comprehensive analyses of resources for early care and education providers that show potential for strengthening the long-term mental health of children, including a 50-state study of Medicaid screenings and services designed to identify promising strategies for infant-early childhood mental health in-home visiting programs serving diverse families