

TOMORROW'S HOPE

THE PROMISE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

tomorrowshopefilm.com

A NEW DOCUMENTARY FILM PRODUCED
BY THE SAUL ZAENTZ CHARITABLE FOUNDATION



TOMORROW'S HOPE: DISCUSSION GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| A Letter from The Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation | 3 |
| Brief Statement from Portia Kennel (on behalf of The Ounce of Prevention) | 4 |
| Synopsis & Film Specs..... | 5 |
| Historical Timeline..... | 6 |
| What is Early Childhood Education | 7 |
| Background Issues | 8 |
| Impacts Of COVID-19..... | 10 |
| Discussion Prompts..... | 11 |
| Take Action..... | 15 |
| References | 15 |

A LETTER FROM THE SAUL ZAENTZ CHARITABLE FOUNDATION



SAUL ZAENTZ
CHARITABLE
FOUNDATION

The concept of creating “Tomorrow’s Hope” grew out of the Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation’s goal of helping bring about standards of fairness and a level playing field with a primary focus on opportunities for educational advancement.

Our view is that documentary film is one way to support and amplify the Foundation’s mission, and obvious inspirations for this project included the thoughtful legacy of Saul Zaentz, a three-time Best Picture winner with a unique career as an independent media producer and entrepreneur. (Zaentz’s films included “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” “Amadeus” and “The English Patient.”)

We were intrigued by the work of the Chicago-based organization The Ounce Of Prevention (including the Educare school on the South Side of Chicago and the incredible yet harrowing story of its predecessor The Beethoven Project) which illuminates contemporary perspectives on important issues and core challenges facing American families. We believe that the thread that emerges in the film - this community’s resilience and determination to build a brighter future – could provide inspiration for communities everywhere.

The intertwined stories in “Tomorrow’s Hope” seem to us to be relevant for everyone, yet at the same time offering particular aspects that are not just fascinating but unusual. Educare’s predecessor preschool was started right inside the notoriously dangerous Robert Taylor Homes – at the time, the largest public housing project in the USA, located in the nation’s poorest census track.

As Portia Kennel and Brenda Eiland-Williford share in the film, these educators and community built outwards from their concept of leveraging education as a way out of poverty – even as the walls around them were coming down, ultimately quite literally. With the specter of violence and danger looming terribly large and ever-present, Portia explains she had previously come to describe this neglected area as “Forgotonia.”

Along the journey, the preschool (serving kids birth-to-five) was reborn as Educare, and in the documentary, we reconnect with three current-day high school seniors who had started out in the Educare’s first-ever 5-year class. As we get to know them, we also explore the apparently continuing effects of early childhood education as they navigate tough realities around and ahead of them. High school senior Jamal Poindexter talks about his early learning as providing a “pathway for how I operate now.”

Also we learn about the notion of teaching not just a pre-kindergarten child but in fact teaching “the whole family” which includes instilling in parents a sense of becoming advocates for their children. A goal is for this tendency to persist and to become lifelong. Portia Kennel recalls how the school’s culture and environment deliberately “said and still says ‘you matter.’”

Aside from the unforgettable personalities we were so very fortunate to work with, we’ve had some more good fortune along the way with this project; after finishing post-production and some initial private screenings, we’re beyond thrilled that Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot has now provided an introduction describing it as a “moving film” that addresses “vital challenges.”

Science has confirmed that the development taking place in a child’s first five years is unlike any other in a person’s lifetime and is crucial for their future. We hope that the work and the stories of the people depicted in “Tomorrow’s Hope” will inspire optimism and support for the belief that change and brighter outcomes are indeed possible.

- SZCF

Brief Statement from Portia Kennel (on behalf of The Ounce of Prevention)



Tomorrow's Hope is a story about the lasting impact Educare Chicago had on three children from the very first graduating Tomorrow's Hope is a story about the lasting impact Educare Chicago had on three children from the very first graduating 5-year pre-K class. As the former Vice President of Programs at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, I had the privilege of leading the creation and implementation of the first Educare School, a high quality early learning experience that affirms to each child that they matter, no matter their color or zip code pre-k class. As the former Vice President of Programs at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, I had the privilege of leading the creation and implementation of the first Educare School, a high quality early learning experience that affirms to each child that they matter, no matter their color or zip code.

I am thrilled that you have taken the time to watch Tomorrow's Hope and experience the "birth story" of Educare Chicago and the extraordinary efforts that made it a reality. Little did we know this opening would mark the beginning of a movement that now has a Network of 25 schools in 15 states and the District of Columbia. The movement is still growing because, it is not just about opening schools, it's about opening hearts and minds to the belief that every child deserves an opportunity for lifelong success.

Before you begin your group discussion, I want to convey the extraordinary circumstances in which this story began. Educare

Chicago was created in the late 1990s during a time of social and political unrest, a lot like what we are experiencing today. The Grand Boulevard community was stressed and under-resourced. It included mostly Black children and families living in deep poverty, many living in the Robert Taylor Homes, one of the nation's largest public housing complexes. Despite the harsh reality of their daily lives, the children's and families' persistence, resilience, powerful relationships, and their capacity to rise above adversity and systemic inequities were remarkable. Because of the partnerships forged with families, educators, community leaders and early childhood champions, Educare continues to be a beacon of hope and inspiration for our youngest learners.

Educare and other high-quality early childhood programs are affirming that early education programs are important strategies in helping to address the long-standing systemic inequities in our country and these early education programs are essential in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Thanks to early learning champions nationwide, more children have a chance to reach their full potential every day.

Consider raising your voice and encouraging your lawmakers at the local, state, and federal levels to prioritize early childhood education, starting early at birth. Our youngest learners will thank you.

Have a great discussion.

Portia Kennel

THE FILM: *TOMORROW'S HOPE*

SYNOPSIS

Tomorrow's Hope brings us into the journey of passionate educators and tenacious kids and their families on the south side of Chicago, determined to carve out the future despite a sea of incredible challenges.

In the film we reunite with three present-day high school seniors who had started out in the Educare preschool's first-ever 5-year class, exploring the continuing effects of early childhood education as they navigate their way through difficult circumstances.



While today the school is going strong, in the documentary we learn about its utterly harrowing yet remarkable early stages as “The Beethoven Project” located within “Forgotonia” – a name the film’s Portia Kennel uses to describe what was at the time the largest housing project in the USA.

Exploring the contrast of promises kept against a pervasive backdrop of promises broken, “Tomorrow’s Hope” celebrates the resilience of the human spirit.

KEY FILM SPECS

Year: 2020

Run Time: 46 Minutes

Film Contact: Tamra Raven,
tomorrowshopemovie@gmail.com

Main Participants

- Educare Graduates
 - Jamal (Educare graduate, current-day teen)
 - Jalen (Educare graduate, current-day teen)
 - Crystal (Educare graduate, current-day teen)
- The Ounce of Prevention / Educare
 - Portia Kennel (The Ounce/Educare)
 - Brenda Eiland-Williford (The Ounce/Educare)
 - Jacqueline “Jackie” Robinson (The Ounce / Educare)
- Additional Participants
 - Teens’ Parents (Jamal: Elisheba & Jamie Poindexter // Jalen: Asia, Jasson, Lenard // Crystal: her mom is also Crystal)
 - Anita Harvey-Dixon (The Ounce/ Educare)

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

HISTORICAL MOMENTS IN ECE

1926
National Association for the Education of Young Children is founded

1930s
Banks and Mortgage lenders discriminate against residents in poor and ethnically diverse neighborhoods, trapping millions of BIPOC residents in poverty

1948 to 1968
Civil Rights Movement

1964
The Economic Opportunities Act funds Head Start Program via Lyndon Johnson

1985
National Association for the Education of Young Children act created to provide standards for ece programs

1988
US Dept of Education creates Even Start

1990
Child Care and Development Grant is enacted

1997
Bill Clinton reestablishes the White House Conference on Children

2001
The No Child Left Behind Act bill is passed.

2013
President Obama called on Congress to expand access to high-quality preschool to every child in America⁽¹⁾, called The Preschool for All initiative.

HISTORICAL MOMENTS AND POLICIES IN CHICAGO / THE FILM

1950s and 1960s
Urban Renewal approach leads to development of high rise low income housing

1962
The City of Chicago opened its doors to the Robert Taylor Homes⁽²⁾ the largest housing project in the western world, named for Chicago's first Black housing authority member and chairman.

1982
The Ounce of Prevention fund created to serve Chicago Mid 80s - Grand Boulevard becomes the poorest census track in the country, highest overall crime rate in Chicago in 1990 - Beethoven Project analysis, Ounce Of Prevention, 1995⁽³⁾

1986
Ounce of Prevention fund sponsors the Beethoven Project (aka "Center for Successful Child Development"), an early education center located directly inside the Robert Taylor Homes housing project

1993
Hope VI is passed - a federal / HUD program intended to revitalize distressed public housing projects into mixed-income developments⁽⁴⁾

- Late 1990s City of Chicago / CHA "Plan For Transformation" - tearing down the Robert Taylor Homes⁽⁵⁾

2000
The Ounce of Prevention fund builds its first Educare school (source: Today - There are 25 Educare schools nationwide)

WHAT IS EARLY EDUCATION?

Early childhood education (ECE)⁽⁶⁾ is an umbrella term that describes programs in a center, school, or home that serves children from birth through age eight, including nonprofit funded programs such as Educare, government-funded programs such as Head Start, homeschooling, private nursery schools and more.

There has been debate over the years about what type of program qualifies as simply care and what type of program qualifies as education. Another concern of today's early childhood education programs is aspiring for them to be "high quality."

High quality programs emphasize the importance of social and emotional development, which is understood to provide a foundation for success through a student's entire academic career and adulthood. Observing the preschool children in Tomorrow's Hope, we hear how "it may look like they're playing but they're actually learning." While kids are in high quality ECE programs they learn how to successfully interact with their peers and with adults; simultaneously the kids' parents learn to become advocates for their children. Throughout the film, we see firsthand how these developments can help pave the way ahead. As Jamal, Jalen and Crystal navigate their way towards high school graduation and beyond, we get a sense of some of the skills, support and resilience in their backgrounds as they pursue a future they view as wide open possibilities.

There are numerous factors that likely contributed to Educare Chicago graduates' resilience and positive outcomes as illustrated through the story of these three young adults and their families; many of which are grounded in research evidence and can be tied back to the foundational experiences they and other children and families had while enrolled in their early years at Educare.

4 PILLARS OF SUCCESS



Their foundational high-quality early childhood educational experience at Educare as the tie that binds them – starting early and staying long in ECE is associated with more positive outcomes



Positive parent-child relationships which stem back to the emphasis placed on parents as a child's first teacher and the importance of a secure attachment and parent/family engagement while at Educare



Parents/Families place high value on education/learning – school attendance, high expectations of educational attainment, good grades, etc.



Parent's ongoing support and advocacy for their child's learning, development, and well-being



CONTEXT/ISSUES — BIGGER PICTURE

QUESTIONS FOR ECE Teachers and Staff

- What has your experience with parents been like? What are the similarities and differences between Educare's approach to parent relationships and your programs'?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- What is being done or should be done in your community to support early education programs?
- How did this film help deepen your understanding of early childhood education and how it may have effects that linger well beyond preschool years?

Unlike the opportunity Educare provided for Crystal, Jamal and Jalen, 5 million children under age 5 in poverty in the US have limited access to high quality ECE. Structural and institutional racism are among the factors contributing to this distressing lack of opportunity. Additionally, the impacts of COVID 19 are further complicating aspects to the important goal of equal access for all kids.

Structural Racism (aka “systemic racism”) lies underneath, all around and across society, not just in Chicago, but across the U.S. It is the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics⁽⁷⁾ – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage white Americans while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy – the preferential treatment, privilege and power for white people at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people.

The key indicators⁽⁷⁾ of structural racism, whether they are intentional or not, are:

- inequalities in power
- access & opportunities
- treatment
- policy impacts and outcomes

Institutional Racism occurs within and between institutions. It is discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and inequitable opportunities and impacts,⁽⁷⁾ based on race, produced and perpetuated by institutions (schools, mass media, etc.). Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they act in ways that advantage and disadvantage people, based on race.

In the United States, institutional racism has been responsible for slavery, settlement, Indian reservations, segregation, residential schools (for Native Americans), and internment camps. While many of these institutions no longer exist, they have had long-term impacts on our society. Additionally, instead of disappearing, prior systems of oppression can be seen as shifting their shapes, which have also included convict leasing and mass incarceration.

As a result of institutional racism, racial stratification and disparities are rampant in employment, housing, education, healthcare, government and other sectors. Despite the passage of laws intended to make discrimination illegal, major inequalities persist. Distinct from “individual racism,” institutional racism exists in institutions where the power to enforce and perpetuate policies and practices is invested in white people.

EXAMPLES OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS

A type of restrictive housing contract that places restrictions on the use and value of property, like signing a property agreement that restricts business operations to take place within the property.⁽⁸⁾ In real estate contracts, restrictive covenants are frequently utilized. These covenants typically 'run with the land,' which means that the promises go on and on, no matter who buys and owns the land in the future. Whenever the property is sold, the restrictive covenant goes with it.

REDLINING

For decades, many banks in the U.S. denied mortgages to people, mostly people of color, preventing them from buying a home in certain neighborhoods or getting a loan to renovate their house. As a result, banks and other mortgage lenders commonly rejected loans for creditworthy borrowers based strictly on their race⁽⁹⁾ or where they lived. As part of that practice, financial firms, real estate agents and other parties demarcated geographic areas that were effectively off limits for issuing loans. This very unfair practice now known as Redlining took place across the country, which includes in many of the nation's largest cities, such as Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Tampa and others with large minority populations.

Other examples of institutional racism include:

- racial profiling by law enforcement,
- use of stereotyped racial caricatures by institutions (such as "Indian" mascots in sports)
- the under and misrepresentation of certain racial groups in the media
- barriers to employment or professional advancement based on race.

STATE-BY-STATE POLICIES

State and local funding for early childhood education varies widely⁽¹⁰⁾ and can include state preschool funding and child care dollars.

State early childhood programs are more often than not overseen by various levels of government and housed in different agencies, creating a fragmented service delivery model.⁽¹¹⁾ To decrease fragmentation and improve the delivery and accountability of programs some states have developed governance structures to better coordinate programs that serve racially diverse children.

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS & ADVOCATES

- Tomorrow's Hope shares a rare insight into the impact of ECE through Jamal, Jalen and Crystal's stories. How do personal stories and testimonies play a role in your advocacy?
- Early education programs not only are an investment in children, they also allow parents and caretakers to rejoin the workforce. What additional economic benefits could arise from having more widespread early childhood education programs?
- How can policy makers support ECE programs in underserved communities that are vulnerable to gang violence and other challenges as seen in Chicago in the early aughts?
- ECE professionals are far too often not paid a sustainable wage - "An average wage of \$10.60/hour undermines quality and diminishes the benefits to children"⁽¹²⁾

IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Since the coronavirus shut down the state in mid-March, financial losses, concerns about exposure to the virus and navigating a maze of new safety guidelines have forced some 9,300 licensed child-care providers — almost 1 of every 4 in the state⁽¹²⁾ — to close, according to data from the California Department of Social Services. In the early, chaotic weeks of the pandemic, advocates and providers pointed to the likelihood of a wave of child-care closures like the one now playing out. The rash of closings underscores the toll the pandemic is taking on family life in California, but also across the country⁽¹³⁾:

- A recent survey⁽¹¹⁾ of child care centers and homes, conducted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), found that just 11 % of providers could survive a closure of an indeterminate length of time without government support—and only 27 % could survive a closure of a month.
- 30% say they would not survive a closure of more than two weeks without significant public investment and support that would allow them to compensate and retain staff, pay rent or mortgages, and cover other fixed costs.
- 49% of childcare centers/homes are losing income because of families who cannot pay
- 25% of childcare centers/homes are losing income because they are reimbursed by the state (amount differs by state) based on attendance rather than enrollment for the low-income families they serve who receive childcare subsidies. This data varies significantly by state, depending on state policy

FOR ECE Educators

- How has your work, teaching methods, or parent partnerships evolved during this period of remote learning during Covid-19?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

FOR THE LONG HAUL

In 1987, the Beethoven Project opened inside the notoriously challenging environment of the Robert Taylor Homes. When the housing project was demolished 20 years later, the Beethoven Project's successor, Educare, continued serving the same community by opening just down the street in the Grand Boulevard area. "We are in this for the long haul. It was important to us, since so many institutions were abandoning these families, but we have not abandoned our commitment to you," says Portia Kennel.

- *Discuss the importance of investing in the communities where you serve.*
- *How can the stories of Jamal, Jalen, and Crystal be showcased to underscore that high-quality early education programs make a difference?*
 - *Studies measuring the impact of early education in 2nd- or 3rd-graders point to benefits resulting from early childhood education. Reflect on how, in following student progress through to 12th grade, the film supports the tremendous growth associated with these programs.*
- *What is being done or should be done in your community to support early education programs?*

In the film, Jackie mentions that for safety reasons her children were only allowed to play on the long exterior hallways (or "ramps") on the apartment floors in Chicago Housing Projects.

- *How did the Beethoven Project expand the playtime opportunities for "ramp kids" future generations, living in these otherwise dangerous conditions? Consider Brenda's efforts to get the kids "outside" and Portia's quote: "You would open the door and inevitably ... every visitor... would gasp ... and they would say 'Who would know that the brightness and the welcome environment is here in the middle of this.'"*



DISCUSSION PROMPTS

YOU MATTER

- *Reflect on this statement from Portia describing the energizing effect of the school environment at Beethoven Project: “The colors, the staff, the equipment, the environment and the culture... says ‘you matter.’”*

In the film, we see Jamal’s creativity find expression in his love for drums and music, whether he’s confidently leading his high school drumline or riffing in the family’s backyard.



- *Reflect on how Portia’s statement above connects to Jamal’s development of self.*
- *Talk about the relationship between creativity and self-esteem.*

Beyond creativity, we see this message of “you matter” as a throughline in the film. Crystal, for example, is very clear: she won’t tolerate any disrespect to the LGBTQ+ community her mother belongs to.

- *How might this message of “you matter” especially resonate in communities that have historically been given a message that they do not matter?*
- *Review the sections on systematic and institutional racism as examples.*

TEACHING THE FAMILY

“Your best chance of any educational intervention lasting, sustaining itself, is to invest in the parent. If you teach the parent to nurture that, it will last,” Portia says in the film. It’s parents who are a child’s first teachers.

Jamal’s mom tells us in the film “When Jamal started he was 18 months. I’m like wow, this is engaging not only the students but the parents as well ... into how to be with your child at home.”

During Brenda’s time at the Beethoven Project, she describes the staff’s compassionate tenacity with parents, continually checking in even with those who may have been initially distant or hesitant. (Brenda: “We pull them closer ... until something clicks.”)

- *How can a High Quality ECE experience positively re-shape a family’s ongoing view of themselves and the world around them?*
- *What are some examples of a parent advocating for their child during their school career?*

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

BEYOND ABC'S

The first five years are a uniquely crucial time for the development of a child's social and emotional skills. In these formative years, they learn how to express themselves, how to get along with others, and how to be in a group – all very important for success in kindergarten and beyond. As Educare teacher Aija Larry mentions in the film, "If children don't know how to socialize then the academics don't come."



- *Review the thinking behind developing social and emotional skills as necessary for success in school. How does it compare with your knowledge of early education programs and secondary school goals?*
- *Studies showing the effectiveness of early education programs often focus on quantifiable measurements such as test scores. Does this film suggest a broader approach / need for qualifiable-driven assessments of ECE programs? How could policy highlight the stories of Jalen, Jamal, and Crystal to push for more government-funded ECE programs?*

Early in the film, we learn that "play" is the main vehicle for learning these emotional and social skills.

- *Discuss the value and benefits of play in a child's development.*

Brenda discusses the effect of bringing children from the Beethoven Project away from the Robert Taylor Homes and outside to a safe playground: "The behavior of the children changed drastically, they were able to attend, listen to a story, and were able to sleep during nap time." A generation later, Crystal describes the impact of safe educational safe spaces as making "the sun look different."

- *What are some other additional, positive outcomes for children that come from safe, nurturing play environments?*

In the film, Jamal says that "Educare ... gave a pathway to how ... I operate now, and it opened one door after another door after another as I got older."

- *Discuss this quote as it relates to ECE social emotional skills making a lasting impact.*

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

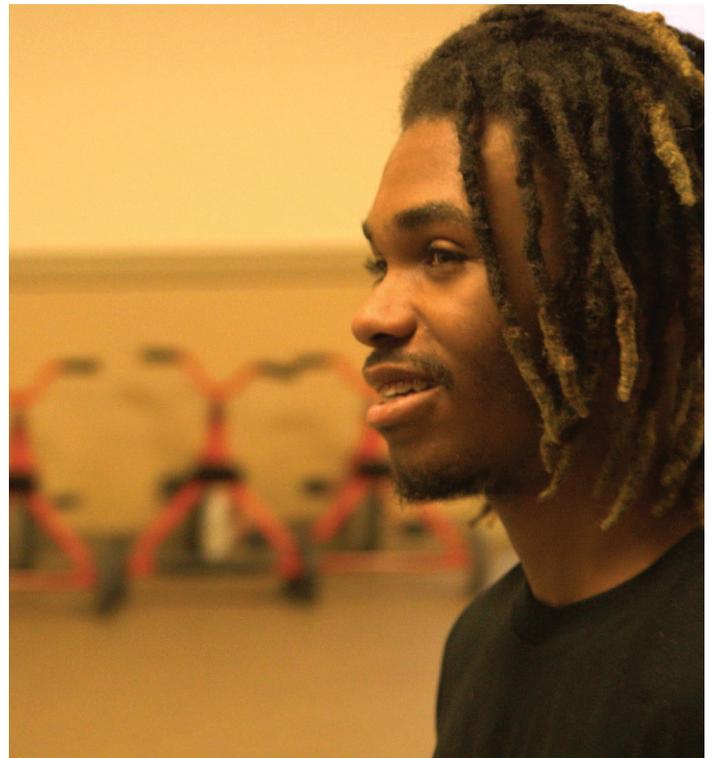
RESILIENCE

Discuss Portia's depth of understanding as she describes being from the community that gave rise to The Beethoven Project and Educare.

- *"There were so many naysayers who said 'you can't do it here. It can't be done.' I said I come from where these children are... I know it can be done. We have to find the right pathway." – Portia*
- *"We're going to do whatever it takes to leverage education for these children as a way out of poverty." – Portia*

Despite the warmth and support that surrounds them, Jalen, Jamal, and Crystal are not shielded from the consequences of poverty and systemic racism, including the harrowing loss of Jalen's brother to gang violence. Jalen channels her feelings and uses her creativity to stand up for justice and inspire others. For example, she reads a poem dedicated to her brother at a March For Our Lives Rally attended by notable Parkland shooting survivors. [You can re-watch Jalen's Poem in the film at 28:06.]

- *What does this scene make you feel? How do you relate to or empathize with Jalen and her poem?*



TAKE ACTION

(Action and advocacy items at the local, regional and national levels)

- **Learn more** about
 - involving families in Head Start via their Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework⁽¹⁴⁾
 - the need for and value of early care and education in Chicago
- **Host a screening** of this documentary
 - in support of early childhood education and other services and resources that benefit young children and their families
 - in support of early childhood education and to advance more equitable opportunities on a broad range of issues affecting young children nationally and locally
- **Donate or invest** in early childhood education so children will have equitable opportunities to reach their full potential and thrive in school and life
- **Support increased wages** and benefits for teaching staff by sending letters of support to your legislators and city referendums.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

Crystal – Illinois State University (psychology)

Jalen – Tennessee State University (pre-med)

Jamal – SAE Institute (music)



REFERENCES

1. Child Care Lounge
2. Wikipedia, 2020.
3. The Beethoven Project: Summary and Retrospective, 1995.
4. Urban Institute, 2004.
5. WTTW, 2017.
6. PreSchoolTeacher.org
7. Chronic Disparity: Strong and Pervasive Evidence of Racial Inequalities, 2004.
8. study.com
9. CBS News, 2020.
10. The National Academies Press, 2012.
11. NAEYC
12. Los Angeles Times, 2020
13. Center for American Progress, 2020
14. US Department of Health & Human Services, 2020