



# FUNDING EQUITY & INCLUSION – PRIORITIES FOR BLACK FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

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AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S GIVING AND EMPOWERMENT CIRCLE

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## INTRODUCTION

This report was a collaboration between the Black Legacy Fund, the Arizona Center for African American Resources (AZCAAR) and the African American Women’s Giving and Empowerment Circle (AAWGEC). The organizations commissioned Dr. Evandra Catherine, Ph.D., to research and create a report with a scope focused on a review of local policies and research related to the education, mental and physical health, and well-being of African American families and children in Arizona, how ARP funds are currently allocated, and provide recommendations on how Arizona’s family serving organizations and departments can access and utilize those funds to better support underserved African Americans in Arizona. Our goal is to distribute the report to organizations with the capacity to address the inequities to facilitate community conversations towards actions that will help improve the status of traditionally disenfranchised African Americans in Arizona.

### **American Rescue Plan Funding Recommendations**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought serious challenges to Arizona’s children and families. The pandemic highlighted longstanding and persistent inequities in child and family serving systems. Many children faced months of learning loss and caregivers faced employment, food, and housing insecurity. Both caregivers and children also dealt with unprecedented death and loss. These losses and challenges were much greater for Black families and children. Thus, there is a critical need for ensuring that COVID-relief funding is equitably distributed and targeted to Black serving organizations.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the federal government has approved six<sup>1</sup> COVID-relief bills totaling roughly \$4.5 trillion in aid to states and local governments. This report offers recommendations for use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. ARPA was enacted on March 11, 2021. ARPA included *\$350 billion* in aid for state and local governments, along with additional funding for other areas including education, health, and rental assistance. Arizona<sup>1</sup> received approximately *\$24.5 billion* (*\$12.2 billion* for state aid, *\$2.6 billion* to local governments, *\$1.2 billion* in business aid, and *\$8.5 billion* for stimulus payments).

The African American Women’s Giving and Empowerment Circle (AAWGEC) and the Arizona Center for African American Resources (AZCAAR) offer recommendations to state agencies in the areas of education, early childhood care and learning, and mental health and well-being. The goals of these recommendations are two-fold, to ensure that community programs that serve Black children and families are equitably funded and that approaches to meet funding objectives are sensitive to the unique needs of Black children and families. Supporting Black serving organizations can assist state and local governmental agencies’ efforts to fill gaps, especially in the areas of education and well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> Information retrieved from Arizona Joint Legislative Budget Committee American Rescue Plan Act Program Summary, March 16, 2021. <https://www.azjlbc.gov/allocationsofamericanrescueplanactfunds101821.pdf>

## Education

National data, pre and post COVID, indicate that Black children across all grades (PK-12) fare worse than their white peers in nearly every academic outcome or domain. Of note, in 2019, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 80 percent of Black fourth graders lack proficiency in mathematics and 82 percent of Black students lack proficiency in reading skills. In Arizona, 79 percent, and 80 percent of Black fourth graders lack proficiency in reading and math, respectively. Unfortunately, preliminary data indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has likely worsened these data, particularly due to learning loss.

Also, national discipline data reveal annually that Black children remain targets of harsh and punitive discipline practices, including over-policing, referrals to law enforcement, suspension, and expulsion. These data are the same across all grades, including prekindergarten, yet there is no data that show that these practices are associated with improved child behavior. What the evidence does point to are factors such as implicit bias and the adultification of Black children that lead to the disproportionate use of harsh discipline. Adultification is the view that a child is older, less innocent, and more culpable for their actions. Adults that hold these beliefs often criminalize the behaviors of Black children, especially Black girls.

Recent data shows that Black girls are subjected to discipline for dress code and hairstyle violations and are over-policed. National data show that Black girls are nearly six times more likely to be suspended than white girls. The problem is so dire that in 2019 and 2021, U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley (MA-07), introduced a bill to end the disproportionate discipline of Black girls, emphasizing ending the criminalization and adultification of Black girls' behaviors. The bill included resources for mental health, counseling, and trauma-informed programs as preventative measures to the use of harsh discipline. The evidence is clear that Black children are not receiving an equitable education guaranteed by federal law.

AZCAAR & AAWGEC education priorities:

- Addressing learning loss through hands on and interactive activities, and through STEM/STEAM programming
- Addressing racism, discrimination, bias, and the adultification of Black girls in local school districts
- Increasing opportunities for professional development and training that build educators' capacity to create environments free of racism and discrimination, and that focus on Implicit bias, trauma informed approaches, and awareness of the adultification of Black girls
- Increasing the availability and access to mental health and behavioral health supports through community and school partnerships

## Education Recommendations

Arizona Departments of Education (ADE) received *\$3.5 billion* to Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund and *\$54 million* for children served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Funding to DES is included in the IDEA funding for early intervention services for children birth to two.

## AZCAAR & AAWGEC Recommendations:

### *ADE ensure Local Educational Agencies (LEAs)*

- Engage Black operated community organizations strength and expertise to meet funding objectives.
- Direct funding to LEAs' community and family engagement offices to increase student and family re-engagement

### *Local Education Agencies*

- Invest in and create memorandums of understandings (MOUs) and/or partnerships with Black operated community organizations that focus on interventions/approaches that enrich and reinforce learning, address mental and behavioral, and student and family re-engagement.
- Invest in and hire mental health professionals including social workers and counselors, and new models for mental health service delivery in schools
- Invest in targeted training and professional development that focus on trauma informed care and mental health crisis preparedness
- Hire non-traditional mental health and behavioral health professionals with other specializations including behavioral coaches, trauma-informed specialists, and suicide prevention specialists
- Invest in summer programming and after-school programs offered by Black operated community organizations that emphasize 1:1 tutoring and STEM/STEAM, and literacy
- Invest in professional development that addresses bias, specifically the adultification of Black girls, racism and discrimination, culturally relevant social emotional learning, and trauma-informed care

## **Early Childhood Care and Learning**

The data and research show that COVID has destabilized child and family serving systems. The entire childcare system, including the workforce, shutdown causing many COVID-related childcare disruptions. Many caregivers were forced to leave the workforce because of provider shutdowns. COVID-related childcare disruptions were especially common among Black households. According to recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, 24 percent of Black households and just 17 percent of white households reported COVID-related childcare disruptions. Black households reported leaving or losing a job, cutting work hours, and/or supervising children while working.

### AZCAAR's & AAWGEC's early childhood care and learning priorities:

- Increasing access to quality childcare through state, local, and community partnerships, including the faith-based community
- Supporting home care providers by providing outreach to increase providers access to COVID relief funding
- Increasing the number of childcare providers who offer non-traditional hours
- Increasing opportunities for strengthen early childhood literacy

## Early Childhood Care and Learning Recommendations

Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) received nearly *\$1 billion* in funds to the Child Care Development Block Grant Program.<sup>ii</sup> This amount includes *\$6 million* in stabilization funds. The Arizona Department of Health received *\$16 million* in funds for Head Start programs.<sup>iii</sup>

AZCAAR & AAWGEC recommends that DES:

- Equitably fund Black serving community organizations and home providers that offer childcare services to low-income families and single-mothers, and that offer non-traditional hours. According to the most recent market survey, only 3 percent of center-based childcare providers across the state offer non-traditional hours, whereas 20 percent of home providers offer non-traditional hours.
- DES increase its base reimbursement rate to childcare providers and help mitigate the \$10-15k up-front investment
- Ensure Black serving childcare providers have access to stabilization funds by providing outreach and application support.
- Engage home care providers to ensure equitable access to funding and the state's quality rating system
- Ensure Black serving childcare providers, including home care providers have access to early childhood mental health consultation
- Invest in providers and outreach in childcare deserts
- Invest in early literacy and STEM programs
- Invest in early learning curriculum and materials, especially books that are ethnically and culturally rich. These materials should be produced or authored by Blacks and other people of color.

## Mental Health and Well-being

The grief, anxiety, and increased suicide and depression that children have experienced during the pandemic is resulting in increased disruptive behavior in many younger kids and increased violence and bullying among older children. The evidence also points to increased mental health challenges in caregivers. In addition to the pandemic, Black children and families faced increased racism and discrimination after the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Mental health effects from the pandemic will be around long after its end. Therefore, it is important that COVID-relief funding is directed towards Black mental and behavioral health organizations and providers to address the unique mental health challenges that Black children and families have faced.

AZCAAR & AAWGEC mental health and well-being priorities:

- Increase children and families' access to Black mental and behavioral professionals
- Facilitate community-school partnerships in order to increase opportunities for Black children to access mental and behavioral professionals in the community
- Increase awareness about suicide in Black youth
- Increase awareness about adultification of Black children, especially Black girls

## Mental Health and Well-being Recommendations

Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCS)<sup>iv</sup> received approximately *\$40 million* to the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant<sup>v</sup> and *\$1 million* for local behavioral health needs.<sup>vi</sup>

AZCAAR & AAWGEC recommends that AHCCS:

- Diversify executive staff, and hire and retain Black professionals within AHCCCS administration with authority to execute action plans
- Invest in efforts to increase access to Black providers and locations through all available modalities, including telehealth and community-based support
- Invest in efforts to increase awareness and preventative measures to address drug addictions and mental health crisis
- Invest in targeted outreach to Black serving mental and behavioral health providers and organizations to increase their capacity to access funds
- Fund research to determine local behavioral health need and number of Black mental health professionals across the state, specifically in predominately Black communities
- Increase access to out of network providers, especially providers of color and males of color, and/or provide families with reimbursement for out of network providers.

## Local Government Funding

The City of Phoenix<sup>2</sup> received approximately *\$200 million* in ARPA funds. *\$143 million* was allocated for community investment to include *\$28.8 million* for education and after-school, recreation, youth sports, and mental health. Funds for education include *\$6 million* to expand early childhood education, *\$1 million* for early literacy tutoring support and library bookmobile, and *\$2.5 million* for after school programs for Phoenix schools. An additional *\$31.5 million* were allocated for vulnerable populations including funds to address mental and behavioral health.

In the areas of early care and learning and education, the Phoenix City Council agreed to use ARPA funds to expand early childhood education by creating a program to increase access for 500 preschool children, ages four to five. Funding will also allow eligible families to be at 200% of poverty level rather than the Head Start mandated 100% of poverty level. Additionally, approximately half of this funding has been allocated for First Things First scholarships for early childhood services for children birth to five. The Phoenix City Council also agreed to fund and support after-school programming in Phoenix schools. Funds are particular for school districts who provide free or affordable programs.

The Phoenix City Council agreed to use funds to target literacy, specifically purchasing a bookmobile that could be used to provide service from a local library and to partner with Arizona State University's America Reads tutoring program to provide 1:1 tutoring to children in grades 1 through 4. Lastly, the Phoenix City Council allocated funds for resources needed to address mental and behavioral health, rehabilitation, and homelessness.

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<sup>2</sup> Information retrieved from City of Phoenix City Council June 8, 2021, meeting. <https://www.phoenix.gov/newsroom/city-manager/1943>

Given AZCAAR’s and AAWGEC’s priorities in the three above issue areas, we recommend that the City of Phoenix create contracts with Black serving organizations focused on early care and learning, education, and mental and behavioral health to meet the City’s funding priorities.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, these recommendations do not intend to be exhaustive, yet do offer approaches for ensuring that ARPA funds are distributed equitably and are targeted towards Black serving organizations. Historically, Black serving organizations have not had access to government funding due to both internal and external challenges such as capacity to apply for, receive, and distribute funding. We are hopeful that these recommendations and our engagement with policymakers and stakeholders are the beginning to newfound relationships that will ensure Black children and families in Arizona are surviving and thriving

In addition to the above funding recommendations, we also recommend that both state and local agencies invest in data collection systems and sharing that will allow interpretation and analysis by Black researchers. While, there is a standard for evidence-base interventions and approaches, we argue that qualitative experiences of children and families must also be considered as part of this evidence base.

Organizations that may either have the capacity to receive and expend funding according to established guidelines, as well as those that may serve as an ally to help support or accomplish outcomes, are currently being identified by AZCAAR and AAWGEC for continued strategic planning and implementation. To that end, the Arizona Community Foundation has developed a resource list for its community, partners and fundholders that are interested in supporting Black Led Organizations. These organizations are posted here:

### [Supporting Black Led Organizations](https://www.azfoundation.org/Giving/Supporting-Black-led-Organizations)

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<sup>i</sup> Preparedness and Response (March 2020); Families First (March 2020); CARES Act (March 2021); Paycheck Protection Program & Health Care Enhancement Act (April 2020); Response and Relief (December 2020); American Rescue Plan Act (March 2021)

<sup>ii</sup> CCDBG funds must be obligated by September 30, 2023; stabilization funds are available through September 30, 2021

<sup>iii</sup> Funds available through September 30, 2022

<sup>iv</sup> Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) is Arizona's Medicaid agency that offers health care programs to serve Arizona residents

<sup>v</sup> funds must be spent by September 30, 2025

<sup>vi</sup> funds are available until spent