Abstract: Despite the well-documented benefits of high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs, we know little about the subjective experiences of those individuals who participate in them. In this study, we conducted focus groups with ECE staff and parents to ask fundamental questions for which few answers currently exist: What does quality ECE mean? What barriers to accessing high-quality ECE do families face? What are the policy implications that lie at the interface of quality and access? Our analysis led to multidimensional conceptualizations of both quality and access, which suggested targeted and feasible policy recommendations for improving the conditions for the children of Minnesota.

High-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs that serve children as young as infants and as old as elementary-school age have been shown to produce a number of positive outcomes. For example, a recent cost-benefit analysis of a sample of low-income, mostly African American, individuals who attended high-quality ECE programs demonstrated that each dollar invested in the program produced a $10.83 total benefit to society.¹ Research has also documented long-term psychological benefits of high-quality ECE, most notably in terms of school achievement (e.g., standardized test scores, grade retention) and social adjustment (e.g., lower rates of delinquency, higher relational functioning).² Thus, the benefits of high-quality ECE are both robust and compelling.

The value of ECE is also beginning to be recognized by the federal and state government. The Obama administration is considering investing in universal ECE for low-income and some middle-income families. Similar efforts are underway at the state level in Minnesota. Despite the well-documented benefits, ECE participation rates in Minnesota are low. Whereas 25% of 4-year-olds nationwide participate in state-funded programs, in Minnesota this figure is a paltry 2%, which is the lowest rate among the 38 states that offer programs.³ The lack of available public programs paired with the prohibitive costs of private ones suggests that access to ECE programs is severely limited.

Our project was based on a collaboration between the Department of Psychology at the University of Minnesota and the YWCA of Minneapolis. The YWCA has offered a highly effective ECE program for more than 25 years (see sidebar 1). The YWCA has made ECE its top legislative priority, and thus is dedicated to lobbying and advocacy for funding for ECE programs that would serve communities of color. As research on the quality of and access to ECE is extremely limited, we developed an exploratory study to ask fundamental questions for which few answers currently exist: What does quality ECE mean? What barriers to accessing high-quality ECE do families face? What are the policy implications that lie at the interface of quality and access? It is critical to have a firm understanding of a phenomenon prior to making any statements about needed changes in policies. Importantly, we addressed these questions by talking with both staff members currently working in ECE centers and parents whose children attend those same centers. Staff and parents are likely to have similarities and differences in their perceptions of ECE, and points of
convergence between these two groups’ perceptions could help identify the most salient issues of quality, access, and policy in the context of ECE.

Methodology
We conducted a series of group interviews with ECE staff and parents at the YWCA of Minneapolis. We selected group interviews as our methodology to facilitate a conversation about the topics of focus and to reduce the pressures that respondents sometimes feel in individual interviews. We held the staff interviews during the lunch hour of a staff training day in the fall of 2011. Conducting the interviews at the training session allowed us to obtain the involvement of both a large number of staff members and a cross-section of staff positions (e.g., directors, teachers, aides). We conducted eight group staff interviews, ranging in size from 6 to 9 people each (60 total staff participants), at the downtown Minneapolis YWCA location, but included staff from the three ECE centers that were in operation at that time. To instill a sense of trust and confidentiality, we did not collect any specific demographic information about the participants. This was particularly important given that we were asking questions related to their place of employment, and wanted them to feel confident that their responses would not be later identified. We observed the staff to be predominantly women and racially/ethnically diverse, with the majority of the staff being women of color.

We recruited parents by posting flyers at the YWCA ECE centers and through personal invitations from ECE staff. We provided parents with childcare, dinner, and a $10 Target gift card for participating in the group interview. We conducted two group parent interviews, one with 8 parents and another with 5 parents (13 total parent participants). Unlike the staff interviews, we did collect basic demographic information about the parents who participated, as it was important to understand whose views were being voiced in the interviews. All of the participants were women, ranging in age from 23 to 44, and came from self-identified African American, Somali, Latino, and White backgrounds. Schooling history ranged from elementary/middle school to graduate/professional school, with 9 of the 13 participants reporting high school or some college as their highest level of schooling. Eleven of the participants were employed, one was a student, and one was not employed.

The interviews were either trained graduate students or YWCA facilitators. The interviews were semistructured in that we developed an interview protocol beforehand, but encouraged the interviewers to allow the flow of the interview to dictate its course. The researchers from the Department of Psychology and the YWCA staff collaborated to develop the interview protocol. Initially, Moin Syed (Psychology) and Anita Patel (YWCA) independently drafted a set of questions based on the existing literature, project goals, and personal observations. We then integrated these into a single draft protocol, which we brought to a meeting of the YWCA ECE directors and head teachers. After describing the study goals, the attendees at the meeting broke into pairs to discuss the suitability of the existing questions and brainstorm about important omissions. We then engaged in a group discussion about how the questions should be modified. The research team then set the final protocol. The questions covered a wide range of topics, but highlighted definitions of quality ECE, the meaning of access to ECE, perceptions of hardships and barriers experienced by families (including experiences of racism, language barriers, and treatment by government workers), and strengths and resources that families draw upon (see sidebar on page 8 for sample questions). The interview protocols for staff and parents were very similar to allow for comparisons across the groups. However, the parent interviews included additional questions about their feelings about the ECE center their children attend and how they feel their children are affected by the center, as well as the strengths and weakness of the center. We audio recorded the interviews and subsequently transcribed the tapes verbatim to facilitate analysis. All participants provided written consent to participate in the study and to have the interviews recorded.

We used thematic analysis to inductively generate themes present in the data through multiple readings of the transcripts. The team discussed potential themes over numerous meetings until consensus was reached on the number and nature of themes present (Table 1). After settling on the themes, we coded all of the transcripts using a two-step process. In the first step, we identified “speaker thought units,” which were defined as a single speaker turn on the same topic. In the next
step, we coded these units for the presence of the 12 themes generated for the study. Units could be coded for as many of the 12 themes as were present. This analytic approach was consistent with our interest in what participants said and how often they said it, as a group, rather than linking individual responses. Two trained coders conducted the coding; the two coders achieved greater than 90% agreement for all categories.

Table 1. Description of Themes Identified for Thought Units Expressed by Parents and Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Aspects of Education</td>
<td>Experiences related to cultural values, practices, or beliefs related to the host country/region (e.g., America, Minnesota) or native country/region (e.g., Somalia).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible Resources—Staff</td>
<td>Experiences related to the availability or restriction of tangible resources, such as education materials, monetary funds, and professional support from other staff members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible Resources—Families</td>
<td>Experiences related to the availability or restriction of tangible resources that come from families, including family income or transportation (location of center, car, bus pass), Internet at home, socioeconomic status, and education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Characteristics</td>
<td>Features of family members that impact quality and access to education that are not “tangible” resources. These features may include their personality, parenting practices, communication with staff or the center, availability with time, awareness or knowledge and understanding, and family structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic Approach to Child Education</td>
<td>Approaches to education that incorporate learning in different domains, including kindergarten preparation, life skills, or language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Characteristics</td>
<td>Features of educators and the center that are a part of quality or access to education services. These features can include intangible resources, such as personality or teaching style of staff, and their education or training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Middle-Class Paradox”</td>
<td>Financial difficulties people have concerning making money and not qualifying for services because of their income or job status. Excerpts may be characterized by being “stuck in the middle” (between wealthy and poor), or turning down resources to maintain a status that allows them to receive financial support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of Racism/Discrimination</td>
<td>Prejudices, racism, and other acts of discrimination that may be based on ethnicity, race, social class, immigrant status, gender, etc. These experiences may or may not involve accounts involving the speaker, and could also involve people they know or experiences they have heard about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
<td>Notions of quality or access (and barriers) for ECE that involve policies enforced by the government, case managers, the YWCA, and other structural powers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Perceptions</td>
<td>References to how people outside of the ECE system (e.g., family, friends, policy makers, politicians) view ECE services. These references can involve negative and/or positive perceptions, attitudes, and understandings of the services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Barriers</td>
<td>Specific stories of barriers to access or quality of care because of language differences. These stories can include situations involving translation, paperwork, or not understanding something because of a language difficulty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Quality Indicators</td>
<td>Quality and access issues/concerns that cannot be placed into at least one of the previous themes, including topics such as the food served at the center, the availability of parking, and parents knowing that their children are safe at the center.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

Our analysis resulted in 595 thought units (460 for staff and 135 for parents). Because each unit could be coded for more than one of the 12 themes, the total prevalence of themes was 646 for staff and 174 for families. Staff thought units represented the themes of staff characteristics (25%), family characteristics (22%), and tangible family resources (19%) most frequently. In contrast, the most frequent parent thought units were bureaucracy (21%), miscellaneous quality (19%), and public perceptions (13%). Although the top three themes differed for staff and parents, the prevalence rates of the different themes were similar in several categories (Figure 1). The differing rates of co-occurrence of themes within a thought unit make it difficult to make direct comparisons. For example, although public perceptions was in the top three most frequent themes for the
thought units of parents but not staff, the prevalence was actually slightly higher for staff (15%) than for parents (13%).

Beyond simply identifying the different themes and their prevalence, our analysis led us to think about the responses in terms of three broad categories: definitions of quality ECE; perceptions of access to ECE; and implications for policy reform. Each of these categories is considered to be multidimensional, and all three are interrelated. We describe our findings for each category in more detail below.

Quality. Despite the frequent use of the term “quality” in the context of ECE, notions of quality ECE held by staff and parents are highly complex. Our analysis led to a multidimensional conceptualization of quality ECE that includes how staff members conceptualize the children and perceive their role in the child’s development, staff and parent resources, staff personality characteristics, and appreciation of the cultural context of staff, parents, and children.

There was broad consensus among parents and staff in terms of what constituted quality ECE. Staff consistently referred to a focus on the “whole child” as a guiding philosophy to their approach as educators. In addition to fostering literacy and numeracy, staff members viewed their role as serving a larger purpose in the children’s development, as described by one staff member:

I think it is programs that focus on the whole child, not just one specific domain or aspect of development. So everything from, you know, nutrition and well-being to family services, academics, you know, all those different learning areas.

Parents also recognized and valued this holistic approach. Although they did not name it “holistic” or oriented toward the “whole child,” the parents we spoke with clearly observed this principle in action. As stated by one parent:

One thing I noticed about this place is compared to [another center], is that they had things going there, but this one being connected to the Y, they go swimming, and they have this person singing to the babies, you know, comes in with a guitar and sings to the babies, and my middle son, they had a person come in and work with his reading and, so he was really prepared going to kindergarten—there was a, you know curriculum there. It wasn’t just like sitting around and messing up in class, being bad because you’re in daycare. They really had structure, like really prepared them to going to kindergarten. And, so that to me is quality.

These statements suggest that both sides of the ECE relationship value a broader focus to education beyond academics.

Another point of clear convergence in definitions of quality was around staff training. Staff members themselves articulated the importance of their training in ECE; many of the head teachers hold master’s degrees and most have extensive experience working in educational settings. From their perspective, this
training leads to a more intentional learning environment, where they carefully structure the classroom and curriculum and actively engage with the children. This intentional approach was often contrasted with what teachers had heard about or observed in other centers in the Twin Cities area. They explained that many of these centers seemed motivated to simply pass the time as easily as possible rather than doing the hard work of engaging the children. To them, this is the difference between daycare and preschool, with the latter being more aligned with quality.

As with the holistic perspective of the children, parents clearly were aware of and valued the intentional educational approach of the YWCA teachers that reflected their training. Like the staff members, parents often used other centers as a point of comparison. In their view, the teachers at the YWCA had a process, a reason behind all of their actions. A story told by a parent illustrates the perception that the process of development consists of discrete steps:

One of the best things I like about this center is that his teachers are very understanding. They know exactly, like the steps, the phases that the kids need to go through or whatever—and they tell you, they talk to the parents. They’re like “well this is what you need to do” or “try this and this and that.” I remember one time when he was having a problem; he wouldn’t put his coat away. His teachers told him to be able to “take your gloves off first,” or “do you want to take your hat off first?” They’ll try to do something in that same situation where, you know, it’s helpful for him.

Less frequently discussed, but no less important, is the role of cultural awareness and sensitivity as an indicator of quality. Unlike the dimensions of holistic approach and staff educational training described above, both parents and staff discussed cultural understanding with a greater level of ambivalence. Many staff members felt a tension between respecting families’ cultural values and practices and taking seriously their charge to prepare the children for future success in American culture, as illustrated by this staff response:

I have an Indian child, every time he drops a spoon he looks at me and says “oh,” or in pushing in his chair and clearing his place, and helping himself stand up again, and picking up after himself and doing all these things. And while I was talking to [his parents], I realized that those were very American values, taking care of yourself, taking care of your own things, doing what you’re supposed to do in your own time, and his parents even told me, “well that’s not really how culturally we do it in India” and they were very, very sweet with me and we had a very nice conversation about it. But it was a big cultural difference and I didn’t really quite understand it, I didn’t really plan for. At the same time, like, you know, how can I meaningfully respect that, but then also still keep up with the expectations that I have for all the children, like that they clear their own place, take off their own bib, pick up their own things if they drop them and take care of themselves?

Finally, the parents discussed some additional aspects of quality that received little to no mention in the staff interviews. First, the parents discussed the high value they place on knowing that their children will be safe, comfortable, and happy while at the centers. This comfort assuaged the guilt and worry that parents sometimes feel when leaving their kids. Knowing that they did not have to worry about such things made their work life much more enjoyable. Second, the parents cited the need for more male teachers in the classrooms. One of the focus groups included a long discussion about a male teacher who was beloved by the children but ultimately left the center. Third, the parents talked about the importance of the food served at the centers. Many parents appreciated the center’s attempts to incorporate healthier, organic, and nonprocessed foods into the meals they served. Others, however, viewed this as trying to serve kids “adult food” that resulted in their children not eating while there. Although the views on the food available at the centers were quite variable, it was clearly an important topic to the parents, yet not discussed at all by the staff.

**Access.** Access to quality ECE is also a multidimensional construct, including the availability of staff and parent resources, experiences of racism and discrimination, language barriers, the complexity of the ECE system, and what we have termed the “middle-class paradox.” The middle-class paradox was repeatedly invoked by both parents and staff, although they did not use those precise words. It pertains to the fact that poor/low-income families tend to qualify for government aid to obtain childcare, and upper-middle-class families tend to have the means to send their children to private centers, but lower middle-class families are left in the lurch. The paradox lies in the fact that many of these families do not qualify for aid based on their income, yet do not have sufficient resources to pay for care. Some who do receive aid were aware of this potential pitfall, and intentionally restricted their incomes to avoid becoming ineligible, which would lead to a net loss in their income. A staff member recounted:

I had a friend who called to get assistance and she was doing okay, she worked with me, and we all
made decent money as preschool teachers. But she had a child and she was trying to get some help paying for his childcare. They told her she made too much money. And she’s like, well, okay, I make this much money but I still cannot afford childcare, so what am I supposed to do? And they said “well, you should probably ask your hours to be cut or quit that job and get a part-time job!” (background chuckles)

The middle-class paradox left both staff and parents frustrated and stupefied. To them, it embodied everything that is wrong with the approach to ECE in the United States. Many felt that the system encouraged people to not work and go on welfare, rather than rewarding them for maintaining steady employment. One staff member articulated this idea:

I think the system itself is just backwards. If you have a job, and you need daycare assistance, you get put on a waiting list and you have to wait up to two years before you can get that help. But if you don’t have a job, and you’re getting help from the county, you get daycare like that (snaps fingers). That’s a barrier. It should be, in my opinion, the other way around. If you have a job you should be able to get daycare if you can prove that you are working. That’s helping someone.

In many of the parent and staff interviews, discussion about eligibility for assistance closely aligned with respondents’ perceptions of an overly complicated bureaucratic system. These discussions pertained to the system itself and how it is organized, as well as individual workers who embodied the negative spirit of the system. In terms of the system itself, staff found themselves drowning in paperwork that, to them, was not necessary. The difficulty with which individuals navigated the system was compounded by perceptions that many of the government workers were not as helpful as they should be, and often acted as “gatekeepers” to assistance in ways that seemed unreasonable to those seeking aid. As one parent stated:

[The worker] treats me like he owns the stuff I’m trying to get, the money or whatever.

Parents voiced general consensus that interactions with government workers were a “crap shoot,” in that some are great and some are not, and you never know which kind of worker you might get. Although parents were vocal about the challenges they faced with government workers, they also spoke quite positively about advocates who worked on their behalf, particularly job counselors. The parents in our groups saw these workers as indispensable advocates who were truly motivated to work on behalf of the families, as demonstrated in this story told by a parent:

I’ve never had to use daycare before for my daughter, and my job counselor got it within two days my daughter was in here, with my job counselor. Any other time she said I’d have to wait like a month [on a] waiting list. She started it in two days so my daughter could go here so I could work. Two days. I was like, dang.

Two additional themes concerning barriers were closely intertwined with perceptions of the bureaucratic system: language barriers and experiences of racism and discrimination. Language barriers, in particular, were often discussed in terms of forms not being available in different languages, communication breakdowns between families and government workers, and the lack of available interpreters. Some comments highlighted how families are not always aware that interpreters are available upon request. Further, others raised the point that availability of forms in different languages is not helpful if the parent seeking the assistance is not literate in any language.

Finally, respondents frequently described their experiences of racism and discrimination. Oftentimes it was couched in content areas described above, such as the bureaucracy or language barriers. However, staff, in particular, recounted personal stories of racism in the course of the work in ECE. Many such stories came from staff of color who were treated skeptically by White families:

I’ve had kids come in and they see me and then they’d see the other [White] teachers and then they run straight to that teacher. In the beginning when they first start, even the parents would sometimes be iffy about me, but then after a month or two their kids like playing with me and then, the parents come to me, like “she’s really, she’s really looking like mommy with you” and “I didn’t really expect that,” and I’m thinkin’ you didn’t seem like that, and I’m like what do you mean by, “expect that?”

In general, however, racism and discrimination were infrequently described in personal terms. This finding was especially true for the parents, many of whom directly denied they had any such experiences. Despite this, most respondents readily identified experiences and instances of institutional discrimination, the ways in which our social structures, bureaucracies, and policies differentially impact families of color compared with White families. This tendency to deny personal discrimination while acknowledging the existence of discrimination has long been described in the social-science research literature. One staff member spoke in terms of curriculum:

I have worked at another childcare center in Minneapolis and they didn’t have one piece at all in their curriculum about like diversity or inclusion or anything. That wasn’t really a focus and there wasn’t any training about it, so the example you mentioned where everybody was painted the same same, I can see where the teachers were never really brought aware of it, there’s no training around it or how to include children of color.

Policy. A key policy-relevant theme pertains to public perceptions of ECE and ECE staff. Staff members perceive little respect for what they do among the public, which includes friends, family, and policy makers. For example, they reported that many seem to perceive their chosen career as temporary, a stepping stone to “something else,” and do not properly acknowledge the training they have received or the importance of the work. A recurring theme throughout the interviews is that staff respondents believe the public views ECE as simply “baby-sitting” rather than skilled labor that requires training, hard work, dedication, and engagement with children.

These mistaken perceptions can be linked to legislative decisions that restrict funding and resources to ECE. A lack of understanding of what staff members actually do and what takes place at high-quality ECE centers inhibits an understanding of how funding is justified and necessary. Staff members at one center suggested that perhaps they should call for the governor to come spend a day at one of the centers:

I think if they can spend a little bit of time, even once a time in life, sit in the classroom for eight hours watching a teacher work, what we’re doing. I think that’d really make so much difference. I can see every teacher, how much hard work, even for the infants, even for the little babies. How much heart. Hopefully this governor can come here, really see. “Yeah, I’ll stand up, sure I’m supporting you, and oh yeah, oh yeah.” No. No. No. No. Never works. They have to come here.

Yes, exactly. And then if, when in office, “Oh my god, this is tough, tough and different. I saw. All the difference I heard.” Then change might be possible.

Indeed, another staff group reported attempting to engage former Governor Ventura in a similar discussion:

Governor Ventura said that he thought that children should be watched by a trusted neighbor or a grandmother (laughter). I was working at a preschool in Northeast Minneapolis, a very urban population, and we invited him to take a tour of our center, because we were like “you need to come and see what we do. I have a lesson plan. You know, this week we’re studying guppies. Is your neighbor going to do that? No. You know?” And, I’m sorry, your grandmother isn’t good enough, if you want your kids to excel in school, they need to get an education and they need to get it early. We all wanted him to come to our center and tour it. He never did.

**Recommendations and Public Policy Implications**

The findings about public perceptions of ECE suggest the need for greater dissemination of information about what quality ECE is and why it is important. Two recommendations come to the fore:

- Implement a public-awareness campaign that highlights not only that ECE is important, but what exactly quality ECE is.
- Provide public officials the opportunity to learn about ECE and see quality ECE in action. Given that ECE has emerged as a priority legislative item, the governor and other state legislators should make meaningful visits to quality ECE centers around Minnesota to gain first-hand knowledge of the activities therein.

In addition to the public perceptions of ECE, our observation of the middle-class paradox is one of the key policy-related findings in our analysis. In contrast to the previous recommendations that target knowledge or awareness, the policy recommendations that follow from the middle-class paradox are financial, highlighting the need to support a greater proportion of the community:

- Increase access to quality programs for 3- to 4-year-old children living at or below 185% poverty through additional resources, and adopt a solution that will expand access to 0- to 5-year-olds by fiscal year 2017.
- Restore cuts to the childcare system, such as Child Care Assistance reimbursement rates and grants to the infrastructure needed to train, build, and develop quality childcare.

Although these recommendations would by no means eliminate the middle-class paradox, they would go a long way toward supporting working parents, allowing them to both advance in their careers and receive high-quality education for their children.

**Concluding Thoughts**

We view the current project as an initial exploratory inquiry into the relatively unexamined topic of quality of and access to ECE. Although a great deal of public discourse around the value and need for ECE currently exists, we feel stories such as the ones shared by parents and staff in our study are necessary to provide a human touch to the issue. Moreover, our interviews revealed aspects of the ECE experience from both parent and staff perspectives that are not part of the public conversation. Our goal is that our analysis can help move some of these issues into that public sphere.

It is important to note that the degree to which our findings can be generalized across the Twin Cities metropolitan area are not known. We only conducted our interviews within the context of the YWCA of Minneapolis’ ECE Program locations, and thus we do not know how the attitudes
and experiences expressed are similar to or different from those of parents and staff from other ECE centers in the Twin Cities metropolitan area or centers in greater Minnesota. This issue is compounded by our inductive methodology. Although we view our approach as the most appropriate for the research question that we asked, the themes regarding barriers and challenges experienced by ECE staff and parents may be specific to those we interviewed. This situation may be especially true for the parents, as we spoke with relatively few of them.

It is interesting to note that, despite the mostly negative and unpleasant content discussed throughout the interviews, the majority of the interviews ended on a positive note. The respondents felt valued that we cared about their views, and seemed to feel a bit better after expressing them. However, we also received responses that issued a call to action, and see these testimonialas as a first step toward change that will improve the lives of all of the children of Minnesota. This call to action emerged in both parent and staff interviews, but this parent excerpt best captures the spirit expressed:

I think a better question would be, “why won’t they listen?” They obviously see the struggle and everything if we’re applying for like WIC or food stamps. They know that we are reaching out there trying to get help and then people are on it for years and years and years. We can say we need the help, but it’s just like they just won’t listen. So I think a better thing is—is why won’t you listen?

Moin Syed is assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Minnesota. His research focuses on identity development among ethnically diverse youth and the implications of identity development for educational experiences. Anita Patel is vice president for racial justice and public policy at the YWCA of Minneapolis. The YWCA Racial Justice and Public Policy programs focus on living the YWCA mission of “eliminating racism and empowering women and girls” through individual and systemic change. Lovey H.M. Walker is a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Her current research involves qualitative and quantitative approaches to examining identity development, particularly how people integrate their cultural background into everyday life domains (e.g., academic or professional pursuits).

The authors express their gratitude to the YWCA staff for their assistance with all phases of the project, the graduate students and YWCA facilitators who served as interviewers, and most of all the YWCA staff and parents who took the time to share their experiences.

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29th Annual Conference on Policy Analysis, Oct. 16

The 29th Annual Conference on Policy Analysis will be held October 16, 2013, at the Continuing Education and Conference Center on the University of Minnesota’s St. Paul campus. The theme of this year’s conference is “Access and Opportunities: All Things Not Being Equal.”

The Founding Fathers of the United States declared that “all men are created equal” and that the government had a responsibility to ensure the unalienable rights tied to this equality. Despite the rhetoric often used about the American Dream and the United States as the Land of Opportunity, we cannot seem to eliminate disparities, and many inequalities continue to grow. What is the cost of these disparities to our society? Whose responsibility is it to reduce or eliminate them? Why does it matter?

This year’s conference is designed to look at these questions and consider the policy, political, and implementation aspects of proposed solutions. The keynote and concurrent sessions will consider these questions at both the macro- and microlevel. In addition, hands-on workshops will provide tools and data resources that might help in the development and analysis of policy related to inequalities and disparities.

The conference is organized with one plenary session and four concurrent sessions in the morning, followed by eight concurrent sessions in the afternoon that address current policy issues and processes. Immediately following the conference, attendees are invited to stay and attend a reception, which will provide further opportunity to network with peers, meet and converse with session presenters, and receive information from cosponsoring organizations, as well as enjoy complimentary hors d’oeuvres, wine, beer, and nonalcoholic beverages.

Founded by the Economic Resource Group, this year’s conference is sponsored by the College of Continuing Education at the University of Minnesota. Cosponsors of the event include CURA, the Hamline University School of Business, the Center for Policy Studies, and the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

The registration fee for the conference is $175 if postmarked by October 2 ($75 for students), or $200 if postmarked after October 2 ($100 for students). Student registrations must include a current college or university fees statement to qualify for the student rate. Once again this year, CURA is supporting a limited number of partial scholarships for attendees from Minnesota nonprofit organizations. Applications for scholarships are due September 19. For more information about the conference or nonprofit organization scholarships, or to register for the event, visit www.cce.umn.edu/policyanalysis or contact Nick McArdle at cceconf3@umn.edu or 612-625-5969.