



Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children

Public Policy & Legislative Agenda 2019-20

PennAEYC is the VOICE of early childhood in Pennsylvania.

PennAEYC's vision is that high-quality early care and learning is valued, respected and considered a priority. Primary attention is devoted to expanding access to high-quality early childhood programs for young children. We are also called as early childhood professionals to demonstrate a commitment to the profession that extends beyond the learning environment in which we work. This includes advocacy for the children and families we serve, and for the early childhood workforce. Our public policy and legislative agenda outlines positive goals for funding increases, as well as changes in policy and practice, regulation and law at the state and federal levels. We will achieve our goals through existing and new partnerships at the local, state and federal levels, including our state advocacy partners and NAEYC.

PennAEYC will work to achieve the following four public policy goals:

1. Increase access to high-quality, affordable child care for infants and toddlers

Brain science has determined that the development of brain architecture begins early, and provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. In fact, a child's brain develops faster from birth to age three than at any later period in life. Research demonstrates high-quality child care improves a child's cognitive, language, social and emotional development, early learning and school achievement and that children from families with few resources and under great stress benefit most from quality child care¹. While PennAEYC supports high-quality care and learning environments for all infants and toddlers, improving access to high-quality for those eligible for child care subsidies is a priority.

Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) data demonstrates only one-third of children receiving subsidized care were in Keystone STAR 3 or 4 programs based on 2018 data and as of September 2018 there was a subsidy waiting list of over 10,600 children with an average wait time of 103 days. Improving access to high-quality can be achieved by adequate and sustainable state and federal investments for providers participating in the subsidy payment system. Reimbursing providers for their true cost of care by increasing tiered reimbursement payments to STAR 2, 3 and 4 programs will help secure financial stability for those that meet high-quality standards and assist STAR 2 providers to achieve a high-quality rating. Expanding access by serving more infants and toddlers in high-quality settings that are currently on the subsidy waiting list will also achieve this goal. In addition, policies which encourage family education about the importance of quality and build the demand for STAR 3 and 4 programs are encouraged.

2. Improve professional supports for the early childhood workforce

Early care and education professionals are nation builders, responsible for raising tomorrow's workforce and future leaders. High-quality child care programs can change the trajectory of a

¹ [Investments in Quality Child Care Secure the Future: Infant-Toddler Child Care Fact Sheet](#), ZERO TO THREE, 2017.

child's future by providing them with the best opportunity to learn and reach their full potential. The quality of child care boils down to the relationship between the child care provider and the child and skilled and stable providers promote positive development.² Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS Program Performance Standards recognize the impact of teachers on program quality and include education qualifications for each STAR level, with increasing qualifications through the next decade. However, while these requirements increase, Pennsylvania's child care workforce is not adequately compensated, with half relying on government assistance (e.g., SNAP, TANF, Medicaid) and earning an average medium wage of \$9.71/hour³. Qualified teachers need appropriate compensation that reflects their credentials. PennAEYC supports the following short-term initiatives that will help more teachers to reach higher credentials and degrees, receive increased compensation and reduce turnover in the field, which will also lead to more high-quality programs in Pennsylvania for our youngest children:

- Increase state and federal funding to allow more teachers to access programs which help with the costs of credential and degree achievement and reward teachers for education attainment and remaining in the field.
- Increase state and federal funding for tiered reimbursement rates that reflect the cost of care, so teachers can be adequately compensated.
- Support initiatives that will make the child care profession a priority for funding and focus in workforce policy.
- Support initiatives that will positively impact the public's perception of careers in early childhood education and encourage talented and ambitious individuals to enter and remain in the profession.
- Make undergraduate and graduate academic programs specializing in early care and education careers more attractive and financially viable. This includes the addition of coursework in leadership, advocacy and civic engagement as core curriculum for early education students.
- Support creation of innovative teacher apprenticeship and mentoring programs that offer ongoing learning throughout an individual's first couple years in the field, along with practicum experience in all early childhood age groups (infant, toddler, pre-K, and K-4 classrooms).

While these initiatives are important steps toward supporting the workforce, much more effort will be necessary to achieve the larger goal of a credentialed workforce that is adequately compensated.

3. Increase access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs

An extensive body of research demonstrates the academic and social benefits of high-quality early learning, including a reduced need for special education and remedial education services, decreased dropout rates, and increased likelihood of graduation and college enrollment. Early learning investments also have been linked to reduced crime and incarceration rates and less reliance on public assistance programs. One recent analysis found that over the long term, every dollar invested in high-quality pre-k returns \$4 in savings and benefits to the commonwealth.⁴

Pennsylvania families below 300% of the federal poverty guidelines qualify for publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs. However, due to limited funding, only 43% of eligible families have

² *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*, Phillips, D.A., & Shonkoff, J. P. (Eds.). National Academies Press. 2000

³ [Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018: Pennsylvania State Profile](#), Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E. and Edwards, B. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2018.

⁴ Karoly, L. A. (2016). The Economic Returns to Early Childhood Education. *Starting Early: Education from Prekindergarten to Third Grade*, 26(2), fall 2016, 37-56. Retrieved from <http://www.ijstor.org/stable/i40162406>

access to these programs. PennAEYC supports increased state and federal investments to fully fund the Pre-K Counts and Head Start programs so all eligible families have access to high-quality, publicly-funded pre-kindergarten programs. PennAEYC also supports city and county policymakers' efforts to allocate funding that would supplement state and federal sources.

4. Support high-quality experiences in early care and education programs and school districts for children through grade four.

Play is the work of childhood and an avenue for learning at all ages. Children learn cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills through play. PennAEYC supports a paradigm shift that acknowledges the role of play in children's learning and development. To accelerate this shift, PennAEYC calls on early childhood teachers and administrators (for children from birth through grade four) to implement the following best practices for play including:

- creating abundant and active exploration opportunities through hands-on activities;
- connecting new concepts to what children already know;
- engaging in projects that connect learning in multiple subjects;
- supporting social and emotional development along with physical and mental health;
- offering experiences that stretch thinking and provide challenges; and
- providing time for free, unstructured, outdoor play, as well as physical activity breaks in the classroom.

PennAEYC also recommends the State Board of Education adopt the early learning standards (infant-toddler through second grade) created by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning and that the standards be promulgated in regulation. This will ensure the educational continuum is represented in the series of academic standards, providing clarity to what children should know and be able to do at specified levels beginning at infancy for purposes of curriculum development and teacher instruction. PennAEYC supports teacher and administrator preparation curriculum content and certification grade bands which reflect research-based child development periods and developmentally appropriate practice as they will produce effective educators that are equipped with the skills to optimize young child development and learning. Initiatives to build effective transitions between early learning programs and schools are supported as well.
