

Public Policy & Legislative Agenda 2021

PennAEYC's vision is that all Pennsylvania families will have access to high-quality, affordable early childhood care and education opportunities for their children provided by a profession that is valued, well-compensated and supported. 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 chapters and membership, state advocacy partners and NAEYC.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the vital role that child care plays in the lives of children and working families. At the same time, it highlights the fragility of the system which existed prior to the crisis and has brought programs to their breaking point. Investing in and building a sustainable future for child care programs at this moment, through policy and legislation, is vital to our economic recovery and stabilization of the sector. PennAEYC, as a principal partner of the Start Strong PA advocacy campaign, has advocated at the federal and state levels for investments and policy recommendations to help stabilize the child care sector and prevent the closure of programs, particularly high-quality programs serving subsidized children. Due to the pandemic, our agenda was developed for a one-year time period rather than in alignment with the full 2021-22 legislation session.

PennAEYC will continue its advocacy and will work to achieve the following five public policy goals:

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

This work will be aligned with the Start Strong PA advocacy campaign, of which PennAEYC is a principal partner.

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 children from families with few resources and under great stress benefit most from quality child care¹. Increasing access to high-quality child care for all infants and toddlers creates equitable learning opportunities. 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) October 2019 data demonstrated only 40 percent of children under age five receiving subsidized care and 37 percent of subsidized infants and toddlers were in Keystone STAR 3 or 4 programs.² In order for

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

² Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, Child Care in Pennsylvania 2020, <https://www.papartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020-Start-Strong-PA-Pennsylvania.pdf>.

Pennsylvania to recover from the economic crisis created by the pandemic, it is critical that high-quality child care options be available for working families statewide. Improving access to high-quality can be achieved by adequate and sustainable state and federal investments for providers participating in the subsidy payment system and funds to serve new children. Expanding and improving the child care subsidy program to help give all children a great start and funding providers in a way that pays for the cost of high-quality and provides greater program stability is critical. Scaling up contracted slots for infants and toddlers in STAR 3 and 4 child care programs to provide families high-quality child care options statewide, greater financial stability for programs and greater supports for teachers and staff will help 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 childhood care and education professionals are nation builders, responsible for raising tomorrow's workforce and future leaders. High-quality early childhood care and education programs can change the trajectory of a 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 provider and the child and skilled and stable providers promote positive development.³ The time is now to make significant and sustained investments in high-quality early childhood provided by well-prepared and well-compensated professionals who reflect the diversity of the children and families they serve.

In response to the National Academy of Medicine's 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, 15 national organizations, that represent the early childhood field, collaborated to establish Power to the Profession, which met over 36 months. The Power to the Profession initiative has defined the early childhood profession by establishing a unifying framework for career pathways and addresses knowledge and competencies, as well as compensation. The vision of Power to the Profession is that each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated workforce. Three designations of early childhood education professionals are recommended in the framework with defined scopes of practice and clear preparation expectations. The Early Childhood Educator I, Early Childhood Educator II and Early Childhood Educator III designations will also have an expected level of master of the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*.

While Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS Program Performance Standards recognize the impact of teachers on program quality and include education qualifications for each STAR level, Pennsylvania's child care workforce is still not adequately compensated, with half relying on government assistance (e.g., SNAP, TANF, Medicaid) and earning an average medium wage of \$9.71/hour⁴. 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 preparation programs that provide coursework to ensure graduates are proficient in the Professional Standards

³ [From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development](#), Phillips, D.A., & Shonkoff, J. P. (Eds.). National Academies Press. 2000

⁴ [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.

and Competencies, which will provide a seamless pathway to advance their preparation and role.

- Increase funding to provide rates for child care providers that reflect the cost of care, provide more sustainable funding to support providers serving subsidy children, further stabilize high-quality providers and provide STAR 2 providers the resources to meet higher-quality standards.
- Strengthen and align state professional development and preparation systems to ensure that they include quality assurance mechanisms, support workforce diversity, provide equitable access and address compensation parity.
- Support initiatives that will make the child care profession a priority in conjunction with adequate funding to provide support and compensation for the workforce that aligns with the complex and demanding work performed. Removing the public's perception of early childhood education and the undervaluing of the field as a result of inequity and inequality in our nation's educational structures will encourage talented and ambitious individuals to enter and remain in the profession.
- Support the incumbent workforce by offering community-based CDA programs, make undergraduate and graduate academic programs specializing in early childhood careers more attractive and financially viable and create innovative teacher apprenticeships and mentoring programs that offer ongoing learning. Academic programs should add coursework in leadership, advocacy and civic engagement as core curriculum for early childhood education students and apprenticeships and mentoring programs should 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). Equitable access to high-quality higher education and compensation for a qualified workforce is needed to ensure the workforce can meet the needs of its children and families.

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

This work will be aligned with the Pre-K for PA advocacy campaign, of which PennAEYC is a principal partner.

An extensive body of research demonstrates the academic and social benefits of high-quality early childhood learning, including a reduced need for special education and remedial education services, decreased dropout rates, and increased likelihood of graduation and college enrollment, not to mention creating equitable learning opportunities. Early childhood 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.⁵

Pennsylvania families below 300% of the federal poverty guidelines qualify for publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs. However, due to limited funding, only 40% of eligible families have access to these programs. This equates to nearly 102,000 eligible children living in rural, suburban, and urban communities that do not have access to high-quality, publicly funded pre-k. 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.

⁵ 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>

4. Support high-quality experiences in early childhood 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.

Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic has altered how play is occurring in-person in a program and virtually, it continues to an important role in learning and development.

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 childhood programs and schools are supported as well.

5. Explore Development of Early Intervention Policy Agenda and Advocacy Campaign

Pennsylvania Early Intervention (EI) provides individualized services and supports to families of children birth to school-age who have developmental delays or disabilities. EI supports and services differ depending on the child's and family's needs and focus on enhancing the child's physical (including vision and hearing), cognitive, communication, social, emotional and adaptive development while providing parent education and support as appropriate. In 2018-2019⁶, 102,971 children were served. EI enhances the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of their child in settings such as the child's home, child care program, Head Start program, etc. Their supports are embedded in the routines and activities of the family, community or child care program. EI and child care programs connect and collaborate in support of the child and family.

The research is clear that EI improves the health, language and communication, cognitive development and social/emotional development of young children who have or are at risk of developmental delays. EI is also a smart investment as it reduces the need for special education services. Along with its advocacy partners, PennAEYC will participate in an initiative to develop an EI policy agenda with a broader group of stakeholders and determine the

⁶ Pennsylvania State Interagency Coordinating Council for Early Intervention Annual Report to the Governor 2018-2019,

https://www.pattan.net/CMSPages/GetAmazonFile.aspx?path=~/pattan/media/publications/2019%20accessible%20pdfs/sicc-2018-19-annual-report_out-for-web.pdf&hash=1d6b6923b86d0259991e81b2efe3655032e2c378a68fb997765b3cb25f5eec14&ext=.pdf

feasibility of launching an advocacy campaign.

In addition to our specific policy goals, PennAEYC will engage in advocacy as opportunities arise and as appropriate to support initiatives at the state and federal level that benefit the children and families the early childhood community serves and the early childhood workforce.