

AZAEYC 6TH ANNUAL ARIZONA EARLY CHILDHOOD PUBLIC POLICY FORUM

January 20, 2024 – Online via Zoom

Overview: During the virtual 6th Annual Arizona Early Childhood Public Policy Forum on January 20, 2024, more than 65 early childhood educators, parents, and community champions participated in an Arizona Town Hall session focused on “Collective Impact: Unifying Our Voices for Child Care”. This report reflects the collective voices of the participants and their shared consensus around equitable access to child care and a well-supported, well-compensated early care and education profession.

INVESTING IN QUALITY CHILDCARE

Discussion Group 1

Quality childcare is a visual attribute. When there is funding, we see children thrive in the critical development years of 0 through 5. We see the long-term impact by future proofing our workforce. When funding disappears, there is an exponential impact—it affects women in the workforce, it affects child development, and it impacts skills for life. Therefore, quality childcare *is* equity and it reduces the unhealthy factors that have an exponential impact on our community such as neighborhood safety, work opportunities, and health. Further, early identification of special intervention that children need, supports the syllabus needed for each child to thrive.

Funding quality correlates to quality programs. Pre-schoolers learn through play. Proper funding equals proper play and learning.

State investments increase the opportunity for safe, quality early childhood programs within communities. To underfund educators, classrooms, books, toys, and supplies is unconscionable. Lack of investment from legislators will result in a waitlist and downgrade in the economy. To avoid widespread negative impact on families, work, childcare, and communities, everyone’s voice must be heard, and everyone’s vote must count. This is our best chance to prevent childcare deserts. Arizonans must expect availability, access, and quality childcare. Of these, quality is most important. Year 0-5 issues are critical in brain development that enhances K-12 performance. Lastly, legislators are people like us, and are part of the community. They are our representatives who represent our voices and our votes.

Discussion Group 2

As grandparents and parents, we have personal and lived experiences that demonstrate the value of quality childcare and the challenges of affordability. We understand the value of giving every child an opportunity to reach their full potential with a solid foundation for them to thrive. When working with special needs kids, we can see the impact of early investment or lack thereof in the need for more and expensive interventions and services later on.

In rural areas, families and single parents can’t work for lack of childcare. This impacts their income and therefore their ability to contribute to the economy, pay taxes, and remain in the community. The availability of quality childcare is part of workforce attraction and allows people to work they want to live. The workforce behind the workforce, the teachers and childcare workers, need to be compensated properly with pay and benefits.

A lack of infant and toddler childcare results in the decline of essential professionals, like nurses. There is data available to show the economic impact of a lack of childcare. This is useful in quantifying the gap to help lawmakers understand the return on investment for dollars provided to childcare. An Arizona U.S. Congressman has said that the federal government doesn’t invest in Arizona because Arizona doesn’t invest in its children.

High quality early childcare workers leave the profession due to the high cost of infant care, which is twice as much as that for older children's care (which in itself is too much). On top of that, there are a limited number of quality centers available that have both infants and older children care, which limits the ability of those who want to return to work.

We cannot fail to provide quality, accessible, and affordable care because of the current and future opportunities for children, families and workers *and* the impact on our capability to create and nurture thriving communities.

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the AzAEYC 6th Annual Arizona Early Childhood Public Policy Forum. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Attend Early Childhood Day at the Capitol and will advocate for investment in early care and education with my legislators.
- Attend Early Childhood Day and look up the elected officials that represent my community so that I'm aware of who to contact on important issues!
- Attend Early Childhood Day at the Capitol!
- Continue to email my legislators regarding early childhood education.
- Meet with Rep. Eli Crane in Show Low when he visits.
- Advocate for early childhood education in my community, my county, and across the state of Arizona!
- Attend the Early Childhood Day as well but will also work with my organization to share the importance of early care and education programs with our board of directors so they can carry on the mission as well.
- Contact Governor Hobbs and encourage her to support investment in early childhood education.
- Do my best to advocate for early care and education providers to lift up their voices.
- Get others to be more involved.
- Lead a group on Monday for early childhood leg day.
- Promote the day at the capitol on my Facebook page.
- Provide a holistic approach.
- Research childcare gap data for my local district to share with our legislators at Early Childhood Day at the Capitol.
- Share what I have learned in this training with my fellow childhood educators in hopes of properly informing them and encouraging them to take action as well.
- Spread this information out to my coworkers to inform them of this issue.
- Visit my elected officials during the Early Childhood Day at the Capitol, with my children, to speak about the investment in early care and education and how a lack of it specifically affects educators and the workforce, continuing to impact the availability of high-quality care for young children.
- Share what I have learned with a broader audience.
- Spread this information.

- Attend Early Childhood Day at the Capitol WITH my young children.
- Tell my lawmaker to prioritize investments in childcare this legislative session.
- Reach out to my legislator and attend Early Childhood Day.
- Lead a group at the Early Childhood leg day on Monday to talk to legislators about the importance of this ask for \$100 million!
- Research childcare gap data points specific to my district.
- Email my representative to share and bring that data with me to the Capitol on Monday to share if the opportunity presents itself.
- Reach out to my local legislator and share why we must invest in Early Childhood. It will strengthen our state.
- Spread this information to my coworkers, so they are informed of this issue.
- Pledge to help elevate the voice of our KinderCare workforce -- their lived experience is key to lawmakers understanding of early childhood education.
- Never stop talking about how investing in childcare allows families to go to work and when childcare works, so does Arizona!
- Reach out to my legislature about this issue.
- Be attending the Early Childhood Day as well but will also work with my organization to share the importance of early care and education programs with our board of directors so they can carry on the mission as well.
- Tell my friends and family who vote why investing in early childhood is essential to our community.
- Promote the Early Childhood Day on my Facebook page.
- Continue to email my legislators regarding early childhood education.
- Advocate for early childhood education in my community, my county and across the state of Arizona!
- Bring this up and make it seen in the youth and gov program and help make it seen in the new generation.
- Tell my family and community to invest in early childhood education and how important it is.
- Be a voice for the whole child.
- Spread this information and attend to the Early Childhood Day at the Capitol.
- Attend early childhood day at the capitol and call local legislator to invest in early childhood.
- Attend Early Childhood Day and continue to talk to any and every one about these issues and the need for public investments for early childhood education.
- continue to advocate and educate people about the importance of voting in the primary elections—especially youth and independents.
- Attend my first Early Childhood Day at the Capitol.