

Equity for All Arizonans

AZAEYC 5TH ANNUAL ARIZONA EARLY CHILDHOOD PUBLIC POLICY FORUM

February 11, 2023 – Online via Zoom

THE INTERSECTION OF EQUITY, EARLY CHILD CARE, AND EDUCATION

Equity means recognizing that individuals have different and specific needs and making efforts to meet the needs of all community members. Equity is a way of being and viewing the world that starts with ourselves, and it is the foundation of early care and education. Just as an Arizona farmer cultivates their crops to spur growth, we need to invest in the growth of our children. All children should have the same opportunity to receive quality care and education. Currently, many childcare centers are understaffed, leading to waiting lists and childcare deserts. Equity is just as important for those who work in the field as it is for children, and we must work to meet the diverse needs of our childcare and education workforce.

WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

We must provide adequate resources and support to all early childhood care centers so that children of all economic backgrounds receive quality care and education. The most growth and development happens in the first five years of a child's life. Investing in this early period reaps benefits later on, especially for children from low-income households. Educators were deemed "essential workers" during the pandemic but are not always treated that way. They do not deserve to live in poverty and need competitive wages and benefits so that they do not require a second job to make ends meet, as many currently do. Access to mental health services that help educators address burnout and stress can also help attract and retain talented staff. Mental health services should be available for children as well. It is important that workers have a seat at the table in decision making and their concerns are heard and taken seriously.

Elected officials should visit all types of childcare centers to get a ground-level understanding of what early childhood care really looks like for workers and children in their communities. In-home childcare can help mitigate childcare deserts, and generally, investing in existing programs is a better use of resources than opening new centers. Early education programs on K-12 campuses are another promising option for communities with a dearth of childcare options.

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 5th Annual Arizona Early Childhood Public Policy Forum. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Advocate for equity in my early childhood education in Arizona
- Apply what I learn in engaging in a productive way, my community conversations in my area. Having an action plan.
- Be [an] advocate for children and [childcare] centers for better opportunities and resources.
- Become more involved in watching what our legislative body does around 0-5 care and education and share who is supporting (or not) this system through social media.
- Continue to build my story for the future of early childhood educators.

- Continue to grow as a youth development and early childhood development professional and become a better advocate for children and families within Arizona.
- Continue to learn more about advocacy and will plan to attend next year's Early Childhood Day at the capital.
- Continue to learn more about how I can advocate for the families that need early childhood education.
- Continue to research public policy and expand my knowledge on how to effectively advocate for both children and early childhood educators.
- Continue to talk about the importance of early education and what we can do [in] order to help early education professionals.
- Educate myself in order to be able to help childcare providers learn about the importance of advocacy for their own benefit.
- Implement a more engaging and productive way to communicate with the community.
- Invite my state representative Nancy Gutierrez to [my program].
- Create and write my narrative to illustrate how important full benefits and worthy wages are for early childhood workers.
- Support increasing benefits for teachers.
- Make sure to continue promoting the knowledge of equity and its impact in the ECE field.
- Provide support to my Family Child Care Providers and decrease childcare deserts.
- Share the knowledge I gained with friends, family, and community.
- Share the statement that ninety percent of brain growth and development develops in the first five years with families I work with.
- Share what I learn today with other coworkers [and] teachers.
- Share with my coworkers what I have learned.
- Spread awareness about the importance of high quality ECE for children and the importance of higher wages, mental health resources, and healthcare for providers.
- Take out the time to write my true passion and needs in ECE and take that to the lawmakers on Thursday as well as invite them to my center.
- Learn more about the needs in my community.