



Highlights of the 103rd
Arizona Town Hall

November 3-6, 2013
Grand Canyon, Arizona

STRONG START.
EARLY EDUCATION IN ARIZONA



Participants Cheryl Foster, Immediate Past President, Arizona Assoc. for the Education of Young Children, Tempe; and Terri Clark, Arizona Literacy Director, Read On Arizona, Phoenix.

Early childhood education should be focused on early childhood development, not just testing and assessment. . . . Any measure of success needs to recognize the fluid nature of student progress, including the use of ongoing, authentic assessment.

- From the 103rd Arizona Town Hall Report of Recommendations

For over 50 years, Arizona Town Hall has engaged, educated and empowered Arizonans to create solutions to critical policy issues.

A diverse cross-section of Arizona residents from various communities and walks of life, all interested in giving Arizona's young children a strong start through high-quality early childhood care and education, met at the 103rd Arizona Town Hall for three days of facilitated discussions.

Prior to the Town Hall, participants from throughout the state reviewed a comprehensive background report developed by Northern Arizona University and the Arizona K12 Center. Meeting in facilitated small groups for two days, the participants addressed a common set of discussion questions. Trained recorders captured points of consensus and the entire group gathered for a plenary session on the third day to adopt a report of findings and recommendations. Although not every Town Hall participant agrees with every conclusion and recommendation, their report reflects the overall consensus achieved by the 103rd Arizona Town Hall.

This publication is a summary of the complete report that includes the background research and the report of recommendations. Complete Town Hall reports are published and made available to Arizona Town Hall members, elected officials including the Arizona Legislature, public libraries, and the general public. Download copies online at www.aztownhall.org, or call 602-252-9600 to request a printed copy.

Key Points from the Background Report



Introduction

The early years are a pivotal time of development. The attitudes, approaches, and activities taken by adults with and for young children during this crucial time can make the difference between a strong start and a faltering start.

Early Childhood and Early Childhood Education Defined

Early childhood is a stage in human development from birth to age 8. “Early Childhood Education” refers to the formal teaching of young children by

Does preschool have long-term educational and economic benefits?

Intensive preschool interventions targeting disadvantaged children have yielded significant gains that can last well into adulthood.

According to in-depth studies, children who attended preschool programs were more likely to :

- stay in the regular classroom and out of special education.
- go through school without repeating a grade.
- complete high school without dropping out.
- be employed as adults and to have higher earnings.

people outside the family or in settings outside the home, or sometimes by parents and others within the home. “Early Care and Education” is another common term for the programs and services provided for children from the very young to school age.

Current Issues and Trends

Early childhood learning is increasingly viewed as the most important predictor of later success in school. The result has been a shift from custodial care to a more systematic approach to learning.

Arizona is at the epicenter of change, with rapid growth in the population of young children ages 0–5. Arizona also has a much larger share of its young children growing up in poverty. A recent assessment conducted by First Things First and St. Luke’s Health Initiative found that in Arizona, “... young children are much more diverse than the country as a whole and live in families with fewer resources and lower educational backgrounds.” Without opportunities for this population of children, there will be an increasingly widening gap in school readiness for young children in the years ahead.

Arizona’s Children

As of 2013, The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s annual Kids Count report ranked Arizona 47th in the nation in terms of wellbeing and educational outcomes of children. This has begun to change, with efforts underway to align, coordinate, and integrate resources and programs that make a difference for Arizona’s children and families.

The following is a brief portrait of the state of Arizona’s children.

- Twenty-seven percent of Arizona’s children live in poverty, with greater rates for Native American children.
- Arizona ranks 48th in preschool education.
- More than 22,000 3rd grade students are

potentially at risk for not being at grade level (number reflects students in the categories of “falls far below” and “approaching,” based on 2012 AIMS 3rd grade reading scores).

- The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that 75 percent of Arizona 4th graders are not proficient in reading, making Arizona 45th out of 50 states.
- With 14,600 children in the foster care system, Arizona is the only state in which the number of children in foster care is rising.



For specific resources and links, download the full report from the “Past Town Halls” page of our website:

www.aztownhall.org



Participants Aimee Johnson, Student, Chandler Community College; and George Rushing, Educational Consultant, New Beginnings, Sahuarita.

Arizona needs to focus on accountability at all levels. Using multiple data sources, we should evaluate center, program, and teacher effectiveness; provide professional development opportunities; and fully prepare an early education workforce that can effectively educate our young children.

- From the 103rd Arizona Town Hall Report of Recommendations

Report of Recommendations

After reviewing the full background report prepared by Northern Arizona University and the Arizona K12 Center, participants in the 103rd Arizona Town Hall convened at the Grand Canyon from November 3-6, 2013. The result: a consensus of recommended actions to support early childhood education in Arizona.

CREATE QUALITY THROUGH A COHESIVE VISION AND CONSISTENT STANDARDS

- Expand initiatives such as First Things First, Expect More, BUILD Arizona and Read On Arizona to create best practices and to have a statewide reach including underserved, rural and tribal areas.
- Utilize the Arizona Early Learning Standards and Infant Toddler Guidelines to create a developmentally and culturally appropriate curriculum.
- Restore music and arts programs to all K-3 classrooms.
- Require that K-3 pre-service teachers in training complete coursework in early childhood education and brain development, including working with special needs children.
- Provide additional supports for unregulated providers such as family, friends and neighbors.

ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION ACROSS THE EARLY EDUCATION COMMUNITY

- Support BUILD Arizona in advancing policy recommendations to integrate and coordinate early childhood education programs and services.
- Continue to support the Arizona Ready Education Council K-3 recommendations, and explore the development of a Governor's Council on the coordination of K-3 education.

- Vertically align the education continuum so participants in the system (health care providers, home visitors, families, educators, libraries and other organizations) coordinate efforts to most effectively develop children.
- Collaborate with families to develop partnerships among schools, libraries, museums, health services, faith-based and community organizations to provide additional opportunities for children not enrolled in programs.

PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCES TO ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

- Restore funding for full-day kindergarten, early education and care subsidies, childhood block grants, home visiting programs, family literacy programs and established mandates.
- Expand Head Start programs and comparable initiatives to provide universal, voluntary early care and education.
- Provide tax credits for early childhood education and to equalize public and private school contributions.
- Explore alternative financing such as social impact bonds, endowments, service taxes, national resource taxes, public-private partnerships, and private investment in program seeding.



Shawn Buckhanan, Pastor at St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church in Sierra Vista gives the invocation at the Opening Dinner and Orientation. Pastor Buckhanan also was a participating member of Panel Saguaro.

- Create scholarships for families paying for early childhood education and for professional development of educators and caregivers.
- Modify public policy to include children from birth through 5 years of age in Average Daily Membership (ADM) calculations of needed educational resources.

ENGAGE IN A COMPREHENSIVE BRANDING AND OUTREACH CAMPAIGN

- Emphasize the critical and positive economic development that accrues from investment in early childhood education.
- Conduct outreach to families and caregivers to explain the availability of programs and provide resources for educating children.
- Create a message about the importance of early childhood education at the BUILD Arizona level to distribute within new and existing avenues utilizing sponsorships and media partnerships.
- Develop public relations, social media and media-based campaigns to raise awareness about the nature and importance of early education and create widespread public support.

RECRUIT, DEVELOP AND RETAIN QUALIFIED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

- Increase pay to a livable wage for early childhood professionals.
- Develop apprenticeship programs, lab schools and mentoring opportunities through collaboration between stakeholders.
- Create a pathway for professional development, starting with career programs in high school and continuing to advance degrees, and National Board Certification in Early

Childhood Education through partnerships with universities and nonprofits (e.g. Arizona K12 Center).

- Support and expand existing scholarship opportunities for early childhood education, such as T.E.A.C.H. Arizona and PCCP (Career Pathways).

CALL TO ACTION FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Share learning and change the conversation about early childhood care and education.
- Circulate Town Hall and other relevant reports, post links on social media, volunteer to speak to groups and organizations, write op-eds, and participate in discussions throughout the state.
- Advocate and lobby for early education and become informed about the impact of decisions on the budget and pending bills in the Arizona Legislature.
- Look for opportunities to volunteer, coach, teach, tutor and work within local school districts to advance discussions on early education.
- Support recruitment and recognition of early childhood educators and caregivers.

TOWN HALL SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS

Monday's lunch program speaker was Dr. Adele Diamond, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of British Columbia and the Canada Research Chair in Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience.

Monday's dinner program speaker was Rob Grunewald, Associate Economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

Both of these speakers' presentations were added as appendices to the final recommendations and can be found online at www.aztownhall.org/Early_Education.



Participants of the Future Leaders Town Hall held in San Luis discuss Early Education.

The Arizona Future Leaders Town Hall raised awareness among our local students and encouraged them to think further about their own education. The ultimate goal was to have unity within the community in order to ensure early childhood education is beneficial to students.

- Lily McLaughlin, Future Leaders Town Hall student participant, Sierra Vista

Future Leaders Town Hall on Early Education

On October 16, 2013, the Arizona Town Hall, in partnership with Maricopa Community Colleges and other organizations, held a Future Leaders Town Hall on Early Education that drew hundreds of high school and college students from around the state. Following are some of the key points developed from the gathering.

IMPACT OF EARLY EDUCATION

- There is a strong relationship between quality early education and later success in school and work.
- A good early education foundation reduces the incidence of dropouts, delinquency, teen pregnancy and other social problems at later ages.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION

- The community as a whole is responsible for working together to create high quality early education opportunities and outcomes.
- Government needs to mandate the same level of education for all children to reduce inequality created by geography, income, and language.
- Parents play the most important role as the “first teachers.”
- Teachers need to be provided the training and resources to deliver quality early education and be held accountable for doing so.

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

- Funding needs to be addressed on several levels including affordability for all families.
- Lack of transportation and access to available programs are barriers to providing early education for all children.
- Specialized training and innovative learning techniques are required to enable teachers to effectively reach children of diverse backgrounds.

- Many early education programs lack access to basic supplies and technology as well as adequate funding to pay teachers.

MESSAGES TO ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS

- Invest in early education. It will reduce later costs.
- Children are important to our future.
- Visit our communities and schools to learn more about early education.
- Arizona ranks 48th in preschool education. Look to other states and successful programs in our state and develop a plan for improvement.

CALL TO ACTION

- Attend school district meetings to discuss this Town Hall and stress the importance of early education to the community.
- Visit classrooms, talk to teachers and figure out how to personally take steps to advance early education.
- Volunteer at an early education program.
- Serve as an example for young siblings and others to encourage a learning mentality.
- Expand advocacy from higher education to early education and emphasize the pipeline.



Members of Panel Hedgehog: Debra Mocker-Joaquim, Recorder Gus Schneider, and Panel Chair George Miraben.

Collectively we all must communicate to the legislature and the private sector that now is the time to be bold and do more, not less, for our young children.

- From the 103rd Arizona Town Hall Report of Recommendations

Early Education Quick Links

- ***www.ReadyAZkids.com*** Targeted to parents, caregivers and the general public, this link provides information on early childhood, brain development, early literacy, and the results of investing in quality early education.
- ***www.QualityFirstAZ.com*** A good source for parents and others looking for child care and preschool programs – including Quality First participating programs. It has checklists and other resources for parents, including information about what factors are important for quality programs.
- ***www.azftf.gov*** This link is for those looking for more information on First Things First and the programs and priorities they fund.
- ***www.aztownhall.org/Early_Education*** Here you will be able to download the complete Town Hall recommendations, the full background report, a list of participants, and the slideshow presentations made by our speakers: Dr. Adele Diamond and Rob Grunewald.

How You Can Have An Impact

- Share your knowledge and the work of Town Hall participants with family, friends and coworkers.
- Use available resources, such as those referenced in the background report for the 103rd Arizona Town Hall, to partner with existing organizations and develop ideas that will benefit early education in Arizona. Download the background report at <http://www.aztownhall.org>.
- Keep up to date on relevant programs in your community and action you can take through the Arizona Town Hall (<http://www.aztownhall.org>).
- Arrange a program in your community. Arizona Town Hall can provide resources, speakers, and printed materials. Use social media and personal networks to share information.
- To join existing efforts to pursue recommendations from the 103rd Arizona Town Hall, contact the Arizona Town Hall office.
- Be the change. Model the behavior you expect from others.



We welcome your involvement,
questions, and perspectives.

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Since 1962, Arizona Town Hall has been educating, engaging and empowering Arizonans. Town Hall recommendations are a valuable resource for policymakers because they do not represent the agenda of a particular group or political perspective. Instead, Arizona Town Hall reports contain the informed consensus of Arizonans from different political parties, professions, and geographic areas of the state. A private, non-profit civic organization, Arizona Town Hall has served as a catalyst for conversations and recommendations that have influenced significant changes in Arizona's public policy over the years. Countless local, state, and national leaders have cited Arizona Town Hall as an important factor in educating people about complex issues, and fostering the development of civic and community leaders.

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