

AS SEEN IN

frontdoors
magazine



10 QUESTIONS WITH

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AzAEYC Governing Board President

1. What is the Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children?

AzAEYC is a nonprofit membership organization that provides professional development and resources for early childhood professionals who work with children birth to third grade. AzAEYC is a state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

2. Why was it created?

A quick history lesson: In the 1960s, as more women entered the workforce, there was increased need for safe and secure childcare. NAEYC was organized to promote quality early learning, set research-based standards and develop resources for the early

childhood field. A grant from NAEYC supported the building of AzAEYC, and by 1989, AzAEYC achieved affiliate status. AzAEYC's commitment to advocate for worthy wages for early childhood teachers and access to quality early learning for all families continues today.

3. What are your goals for AzAEYC?

Imagine a community where everybody knows how important quality early learning is on children's lifelong learning. Imagine a community where lawmakers and stakeholders invest in the continuum of quality education from birth through college. This is the Arizona that AzAEYC strives for. My goal is for AzAEYC to help give early childhood teachers a voice in our state. Teacher voices and their stories are so powerful in shaping our community's

investment in early learning. I want to be sure they are heard. I'll also continue to nurture AzAEYC's valued relationships with statewide partners and promote a vibrant and diverse membership that represents the strengths — and elevates the voices — of Arizona's early childhood professionals.

4. Speaking of educator voices, can you share your own story in education?

As a young child growing up with a speech impairment, I know the value of quality early learning. My early childhood special-education teacher supported my strengths rather than focusing on deficits. She messaged that I mattered and was capable. When I got to my very first college class, trying to balance work as a preschool teacher and homework, my professors also messaged that I mattered and was capable. Now, I am a first-generation college student who recently earned a doctorate degree researching quality early childhood professional development. The impact that positive, caring, trusting early childhood relationships had on my life was instrumental in making me the professional I am today. I'm proud to help lead the governing board and promote AzAEYC as a resource for continuous professional development and advocacy support as we strive to elevate the early childhood profession in Arizona.

5. Why is quality early education so critical?

Research shows that 90 percent of a child's brain develops by age 5. Quality early education produces better health and social outcomes and increases workforce productivity. The research — time and time again — shows how critical early education is not only for the well-being of children and families but also for the well-being of all of us. Access to quality early education helps a child to be successful in school and in life. Economists estimate that quality early education can yield a 13 percent return on investment annually per child through better education, economic, health and social outcomes. It's the right thing to do by our children and families.

6. What are some of the biggest challenges early learning providers face?

Imagine a teacher as an architect. Not as a designer of buildings, but of healthy brains. This helps us see how critical they are as professionals in our community. Elevating the professionalism of the field is one of the biggest challenges early learning providers face. AzAEYC's efforts include aligning statewide policies with research and supporting teachers to advocate for themselves as professionals. Not babysitters — but professionals.



Eric Bucher's 13 years of early childhood experience includes directly teaching children birth to age 8. He is the co-author of "Beyond Bouncing the Ball."

7. Do you have any success stories you can share?

A signature AzAEYC member benefit is our \$1,000 scholarship for early childhood college students, awarded each fall. These funds can be used for college coursework, professional development, or teacher and classroom supplies. In 2018, Martha Esmeralda Carrillo was the recipient. Esmeralda was working to complete an associate in applied science degree (AAS) in early childhood education. She is also mom to 5-year-old Cecilia. Esmeralda has a passion for advocating for quality early education for children with special needs and their families. She used the \$1,000 to help pay for research-based early childhood publications and to attend professional development seminars. At our AzAEYC annual meeting last fall, Esmeralda said it best, "We

10 QUESTIONS CONTINUED

need to be advocating for children and their rights. We are all in this together. We are a community.”

8. What other events or opportunities does AzAEYC provide?

As a membership organization, AzAEYC offers great resources for teachers as well as parents and community members. The brand-new “Family Membership” level is designed for members outside of the early learning profession, such as parents, family members and community members who want to support quality early learning. We’re also working to advocate for children, families and our profession by helping host Early Childhood Day at the Legislature every February. Anyone can join us to show their support.

9. How can readers support your efforts to advance high-quality early learning?

Consider donating any amount to the AzAEYC scholarship for early childhood college students.

The \$1,000 AzAEYC scholarship was created to acknowledge the outstanding service of early childhood professionals, like Esmeralda. The scholarship recognizes leadership qualities and commitment to early education and public policies that support the well-being of young children.

10. Is there anything else you’d like readers to know?

AzAEYC’s work is supporting parents, caregivers and teachers — the people whose interactions are critical to children’s healthy development and social-emotional well-being. When we invest in early education, we impact our community in ways that benefit all of us. AzAEYC will continue to provide advocacy training and work to help raise the quality of early learning around the state. We are honored to be a part of this movement to create a better future for all Arizonans.

To learn more, visit azaeyc.org.



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