

## The 4th Annual Arizona Early Childhood Public Policy Forum Report

**Note:** During the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Arizona Early Childhood Public Policy Forum on February 24, 2022, 50 early childhood educators, parents, and community champions participated in an [Arizona Town Hall](#) session. Participants reviewed the [113<sup>th</sup> Statewide Town Hall Final Recommendations Report](#), discussed how quality and accessible child care contributes to vibrant communities, and worked together to create action plans to advocate for the early care and education profession.

The below report reflects the collective voices of the participants and their shared ideas and themes around equitable access to child care and a well-supported, well-compensated early care and education profession.

-----

**Early childhood education is the foundation for a good life, a thriving community, and a healthy economy.** Every family should have access to affordable, high-quality childcare, but too often it is inaccessible. While the groups discussed several issues, the lack of sustained funding and public investment in early childhood education was the most common theme.

Legislators need to understand both the importance of early childhood education and its economics. Without quality childcare parents cannot or will not work. Parents need to feel that their children are safe, happy, and well cared for. The pandemic made clear that most people cannot work from home while caring for young children. Many workers have not returned to work because they cannot find affordable childcare. This is an issue of cost and availability.

Low- and moderate-income families cannot afford to pay high fees for childcare. As a result, most childcare centers cannot afford to pay living wages to their employees. Workers are not willing to do this challenging work for less than a living wage. In Arizona, some teachers live in poverty, or are even homeless and themselves need childcare subsidies to remain in the profession. This creates a perpetual shortage cycle that requires some outside funding to increase the supply of childcare providers and provide more equitable access to quality childcare. The shortages are worse in certain zip codes where there are fewer resources. Children with special needs and foster children often do not get the special care they need.

We should invest in our early childhood education workforce because these workers are essential to families, workers, and our economy. We should also help families with scholarships and subsidies as necessary to assure that everyone has access to quality, affordable childcare.

Early childhood experiences affect a person's brain development and thus their health, happiness, and achievement over the course of a lifetime. Research on the neuro-sequential model described in Dr. Bruce Perry's book *What Happened to You?* and research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), indicates the cost of making quality childcare available to all children is really an investment in their future and our community that will pay off over time through in lower health care and other costs to remediate a host of social ills. If we can educate the health care community about these issues, they might be persuaded to bring their economic and political power to bear in lobbying for the investments that are needed.

Some techniques that can be used to persuade our legislators about the importance of this issue include speak from the heart; be authentic; tell your stories; use your voice; and bring parents in large groups to advocate for their children and early childhood education.

Participants committed to do their part to address the issue of equitable access to early childhood education. They expressed the following commitments:

- I will always advocate for children in our communities
- I will NOT STOP telling the stories of kids, families and teachers until solutions are funded.
- I will listen to and learn from the voices of parents and educators and center their stories
- I will share the connection between adult health and Adverse Childhood Experience to as many medical groups as I can.
- I will start speaking up about my experiences.
- I will have parents get involved.
- I will continue to encourage professionals in the field and assist them with optimizing the resources that are there.
- I will be brave and speak up for young children, families.
- I will always advocate for foster care children. They are always missed.
- I will always advocate for the parents in our communities to tell their story.
- I will encourage everyone, parents or not, to recognize the value of early education.
- I will try to collect authentic stories from my teachers about their personal struggles.
- I will continue to tell others about the importance of early childhood education.
- I will make sure more parents get involved in advocating for ECE.
- I will use my voice to advocate for children and get parents involved! I will share my story with others!
- ACES is powerful and root cause of incarceration, so healthy safe childhood care is critical.
- I will encourage those passionate about ECE to run for office!
- I will continue to help my community.
- I will share with others that young children are our infrastructure and economic drivers of a robust society.

-----

For more information and ways to get involved in early childhood advocacy, visit the Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children (AzAEYC) website at [www.azaeyc.org](http://www.azaeyc.org). Handouts and resources from the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Arizona Early Childhood Public Policy Forum are available at [www.azaeyc.org/2022ppf](http://www.azaeyc.org/2022ppf).

*This report was compiled by Mary Grier, Arizona Town Hall facilitator, with notes from Dr. Eric Bucher, chief executive officer of AzAEYC as of February 25, 2022.*