

# 118th



**America** FOR   
**Early Ed** TM  
**naeyc** ®

**A Federal Agenda to Deliver  
on the Promise of High-Quality  
Early Childhood Education for  
Our Children, Families, and Economy**

# Why Early Childhood Education?

What do many neuroscientists, economists, psychologists, generals, faith leaders, parents, Republican and Democratic governors, teachers, principals, researchers, state and federal legislators, and business leaders all have in common?

They share a belief that investing in early childhood education and educators is important, necessary, and urgent. The years of the pandemic have shone a bright light on the crises in child care and early learning that require public investments, because neither parents nor providers can solve them alone. The clear need for immediate investment is bolstered by the decades of research that show that high-quality early childhood education leads not only to short-term benefits, but also long-term positive outcomes for children, families, and the economic future of our country.



The first years of a child's life are the period of the most rapid brain development and lay the foundation for all future learning.<sup>2</sup>



High-quality early childhood programs deliver a substantial return on investment.



Children's cognitive, physical, social and emotional, and language and literacy development are built on a foundation of children's positive interactions with adults, peers, and their environment.<sup>4</sup>



High-quality early childhood education depends on high-quality early childhood educators who ensure that children, supported by families, have the early experiences they need for a strong foundation.<sup>5</sup>

We know that making early childhood education high-quality boosts the well-being of children and that making it affordable helps parents get and keep a job. Americans—of all political, geographic, and demographic backgrounds—know this, too. They understand how important it is for families to be able to choose high-quality early childhood education that best meets their needs. They recognize early childhood educators as professionals who should be well-compensated for their complex and demanding jobs and responsibilities. Yet they know parents can't afford to pay more in support of those salaries, and that families already can't find the quality care they need for their infants, toddlers, or preschoolers. They know that care and education go hand-in-hand, and that learning and development start well before the first day of kindergarten. They understand the evidence-based connection between having high-quality educators and having high-quality education, and they know investing in early childhood education and educators helps our country win at home and in the global environment.

The essential nature of child care in supporting children's positive growth and development—and in driving our local and national economies—has never been more apparent than during the pandemic.

Well-spent relief funding helped stabilize the sector, but we cannot go back to the crises and challenges of the past when six-out-of-seven children eligible for child care assistance could not receive it and child care providers were paid so little that nearly half had to be on public assistance to make ends meet.

We must continue to make progress towards the necessary, significant, and sustained investments in quality child care and early learning that respond to our communities' short- and long-term needs, and support America's economy, families' economic security, and children's success.

# Why NAEYC?

For nearly 100 years, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has been the trusted voice of high-quality early learning in the United States and around the globe. As the foremost professional association for the early childhood field, NAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.

## Research and Evidence Based

The policies, standards, and practices we develop and advocate for are based on research and evidence in child development. This ever-growing body of work forms the foundation for NAEYC's accreditation standards, which serve as the industry standard of quality for early learning programs. The accreditation standards and their implementation support developmentally appropriate practices and foster rich learning environments and experiences. These, in turn, have been shown to have a positive impact on children's brain development, early literacy skills, social relationships, and learning foundations.

In addition to our early learning program standards, NAEYC leads the field in developing and implementing professional preparation standards. Revised in 2020, the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators are designed for adoption by states and institutions of higher education across the country so that practitioners and students who commit to careers in the early childhood profession develop into educators with the requisite skills and knowledge.

NAEYC, committed to elevating the voices of the early childhood profession, is also engaged in a national, state, and local collaboration to establish and implement a shared framework of career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards, and compensation that unifies the profession. We aim to ensure that our nation's policies and practices catch up with the significant body of research and science about the individual and collective benefits that accrue when children have access to high-quality early learning settings with supported, skilled, and knowledgeable teachers.

### NAEYC Fast Facts

More than **60,000** members

More than **310,000** followers on social media

51 Affiliates in **44** States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico

More than **220** institutions of higher education house programs that are accredited by NAEYC

More than **7,100** early childhood programs accredited by NAEYC across the country

### NAEYC Strategic Priorities

**Goal:** Each and every child birth through age 8 has equitable access to developmentally-appropriate, high-quality early childhood education

**Goal:** Early childhood educators are effective, diverse, well-prepared, and well-compensated across all states and settings in alignment with the Unifying Framework.

### Did You Know?

**Nearly 1/3 of early childhood educators are considering leaving their job or closing their family child care home — unless they can access increased, competitive compensation that allows them to stay.**

For more national and state-based data from NAEYC's ECE field surveys, visit [naeyc.org/pandemic-surveys](https://naeyc.org/pandemic-surveys).

# Recommendations for the 118th Congress

As the 118th Congress makes critical choices to guide our nation's future, it is time to prioritize an agenda that recognizes the importance of child care and early learning in helping our children, families, communities, and economy thrive. This agenda includes providing sustainable funding sufficient to build equity, quality, and supply by advancing a supported and compensated early childhood education workforce across all states and settings. Specifically, comprehensive investments are needed to:



## Invest in Child Care and Early Learning

Even prior to the pandemic, an underfunded child care system meant a failing child care infrastructure in which the vast majority of children (84%) were not receiving the support for which they are eligible while child care providers earned so little that nearly half had to be on public assistance to make ends meet. An infusion of federal relief funding helped expand eligibility, lower costs for families, and raise wages for providers. Now, however, as relief begins to fade, parents, providers, and businesses are facing an increasingly dire situation that compels Congress to build on its bipartisan support for child care and early learning.

Providing funding sufficient to expand eligibility for families and raise payment rates for providers to reflect the true cost of providing high-quality child care will lead to an increase in supply and quality, ensuring more low- and moderate- income families are able to choose and afford quality child care provided by compensated, supported early childhood educators.

For this reason, Congress must ensure spending levels are robust enough that they can:

- › Prioritize, protect, and provide **funding increases for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** in order to support states in increasing the supply, affordability, and quality of child care programs.
- › Grow funding for Preschool Development Grants so states can implement plans to improve birth through five early childhood education systems
- › Increase funding for Head Start, Early Head Start and the Early Head Start – Child Care Partnerships so that more children and families can benefit from high-quality early learning and comprehensive supports that help them achieve short- and long-term success
- › Strengthen the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit to make it fully refundable and adapt the structure to ensure families receive the credit as they pay the cost of care.

## Invest in the Early Childhood Education Workforce

Congress can support the early childhood education workforce — which makes all other work possible — by prioritizing investments in their education and compensation, with policies and funding designed to:

- › **Expand direct funding, loan forgiveness, and loan cancellation** for current and prospective early childhood educators working in all settings, including family child care and center-based child care, as they earn ECE credentials and degrees
- › **Increase equitable access to higher education** by increasing the value of Pell Grants; ensuring higher education is affordable and accessible to everyone, regardless of immigration status; and providing targeted investments in building educator preparation programs at HBCUs and MSIs.
- › **Provide comprehensive scholarships for educators and supports to IHEs** to increase access to ECE accredited higher education programs for associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees in early childhood education.
- › **Increase access to ECE apprenticeship programs** and other practice-based ECE preparation models to support early childhood educators who are already in the workforce and who are seeking increased postsecondary credentials.
- › **Increase compensation for all early childhood educators** through direct supports and tax credits, in alignment with increased competency and credentials.
- › **Incentivize a focus on educators working with infants and toddlers**, through targeted loan forgiveness, scholarships, subsidy rate increases, tax benefits, and wage increases
- › **Provide increased support to students who are also parents**, helping them afford child care while they complete their degrees and credentials, through funding increases to the CCAMPIS program
- › Support the Higher Education Act’s Title II Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grants, ensuring they **include all early childhood education settings**, and establishing a priority for articulation between community colleges and baccalaureate programs
- › **Maintain and improve TEACH Grants**, while making them more accessible to early childhood educators working across all settings
- › Embed a phased-in, **profession-determined baseline of knowledge, skills, and competencies** for early childhood educators, aligned with compensation.

To meet the needs of the present, and prepare for a stronger and more equitable future, our nation's leaders must make the investments that help all our families access opportunities to thrive.

We must prioritize the early childhood professionals who, through their complex and critical work, are supporting our nation's economy while caring for and educating the next generation.

We call on Congress to continue to make progress towards the necessary, significant, and sustained investments in quality child care and early learning that respond to our communities' short- and long-term needs, and support America's economy, families' economic security, and children's success.



<sup>1</sup> NAEYC ECE Field Surveys. [www.naeyc.org/pandemic-surveys](http://www.naeyc.org/pandemic-surveys)

<sup>2</sup> Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture>

<sup>3</sup> The Heckman Equation. <http://heckmanequation.org/content/resource/lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program-one-page>

<sup>4</sup> Kontos, S., & A. Wilcox-Herzog. 1997. "Teachers' Interactions with Children: Why Are They So Important?" *Young Children* 52 (2): 4-12; Hamre, B.K., B.E. Hatfield, R.C. Pianta, & F.M. Jamil. 2013. "Evidence for General and Domain-Specific Elements of Teacher-Child Interactions: Associations with Preschool Children's Development." *Child Development*, DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12184

<sup>5</sup> Institute of Medicine (IOM) & National Research Council (NRC). 2015. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.