

# 117th



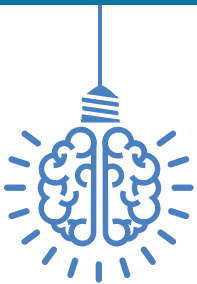
**America** FOR   
**Early Ed** TM  
**naeyc** ®

A Federal Agenda to Deliver  
on the Promise of High-Quality  
Early Childhood Education for  
Our Children, Families, & 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 high-quality early childhood education and early childhood educators will make America brighter, stronger, and more competitive. Why? Because decades of research have shown that early investment produces positive outcomes for our children, our 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 return on investment that outpaces average stock market gains.<sup>3</sup>



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 have complex and demanding jobs and responsibilities. They understand the evidence-based connection between having high-quality educators and having high-quality education, and they know investing in early childhood education helps our country compete and win in the global environment.<sup>1</sup>

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 COVID 19 pandemic. This public health crisis exacerbated and magnified the child care crisis. As quality child care programs struggle, suffer, and close, the children who benefit the most fall further behind.

To fully extend America's promise of a world-class education to the next generation, learning must start well before the first day of kindergarten for all children. Our nation can and must do better to create opportunities that help all children and families succeed.

It is time for Congress to provide urgent and ongoing investments to stabilize and sustain child care and early learning so the essential workforce in this \$99 billion industry can continue to support children, families, and the American economy through this crisis, recovery, and beyond.

# Why NAEYC?

For more than 90 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 entire 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.

Nearly **90%** of voters say early childhood educators are important members of their communities, on par with firefighters and nurses.

### NAEYC Fast Facts

More than **60,000** members

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

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:** Children birth through age 8 have equitable access to developmentally appropriate, high-quality early learning.

**Goal:** The early childhood education profession exemplifies excellence and is recognized as vital and performing a critical role in society.

**83%** of voters would support a public investment in early childhood education that is used to increase educators' wages.

# Recommendations for the 117th Congress

As the 117th Congress makes critical choices about relief, recovery, and rebuilding for our nation's future, NAEYC offers the following recommendations to help children, families, and communities thrive.

## Investing in Child Care as Part of America's Infrastructure

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. Now, with an increasingly dire situation facing children, families, educators, and businesses, Congress must continue to build on its bipartisan support for early childhood programs to increase access to affordable, quality care and education by:

- › Continuing to provide substantial discretionary and mandatory increases in funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) in order to support states in expanding eligibility and raising payment rates to ensure more low- and moderate-income families are able to choose and afford quality child care provided by educators who don't have to subsist on poverty-level wages.
- › Establish and substantially fund a Child Care Stabilization Fund to sustain the child care sector reeling from pandemic challenges, and support child care centers and family child care homes to either re-open or remain open, retain staff, and pay fixed expenses in the face of decreased enrollments and increased costs.
- › Supporting increases in payment rates for early childhood educators serving families receiving child care assistance, so that states can reach the federally recommended benchmark of paying at the 75th percentile of current market rates and move toward payments based on the cost of high-quality child care
- › Increasing 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
- › Providing continued funding for Preschool Development Grants so states can implement plans to improve birth through five early childhood education systems

It is time for Congress to take the next step and pass the Child Care for Working Families Act, a comprehensive public investment that delivers on the science of early learning and equitably advances our current and workforce.



## Building a Stronger Early Childhood Education Profession

Skilled, supported, and compensated early childhood educators provide high-quality early childhood education and set our nation's children on a path to resilience and success. An average wage of \$10.60/hour threatens program supply, undermines quality, and diminishes the benefits to children, families, and our economy. Congress can help build a stronger early childhood education profession by

- › Expanding 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 doubling the maximum 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.
- › Supporting 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
- › Providing 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
- › Maintaining and improving TEACH Grants, while making them more accessible to early childhood educators
- › Explicitly naming, including, and funding teacher preparation and early childhood education in all legislation increasing availability of and access to apprenticeship programs.

## Supporting Smart Tax Incentives that Help Families and Drive Quality

While substantial, direct investments are necessary to increase supply and drive quality, Congress can, in addition, help families through the tax code by

- › Helping more lower- and middle-income families afford child care by strengthening the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit to
  - Make it fully refundable
  - Increase allowable expense limits to cover a greater proportion of families' child care costs
  - Increase the sliding scale so that it provides more assistance to middle-class families
  - Change the payment's structure so families receive the credit as they pay the cost of care
- › Improving the quality of child care by establishing new tax credits—based on innovations in Louisiana and Nebraska—that reward educators who improve their teaching practices by increasing their qualifications and credentials





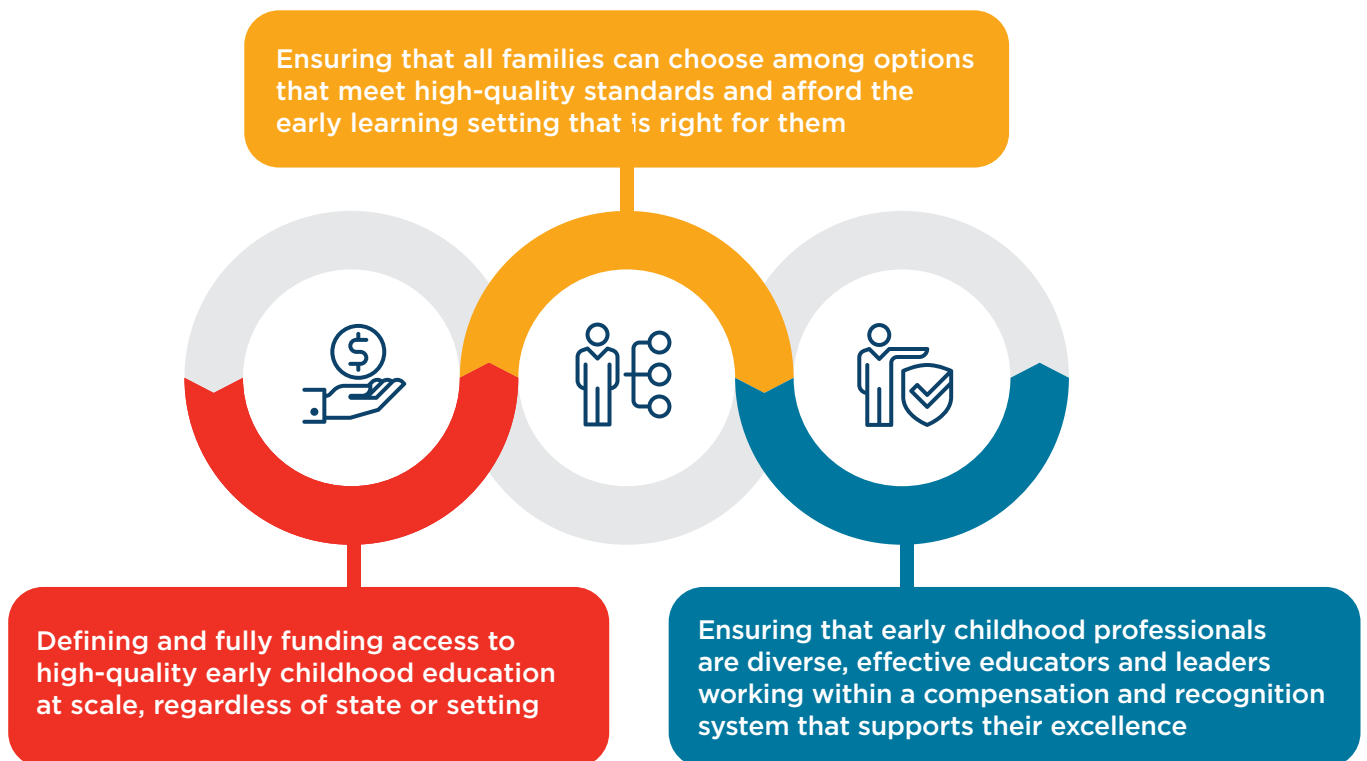
In 1944, a conservative coalition in Congress passed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, or the GI Bill. Hailed as a stunning success, the GI Bill provided a generation of service members with upward mobility and economic opportunity, transforming our country in the process.

To transform our future, we can—and we must—make investments like this again, prioritizing the professionals who, with complex and demanding jobs and responsibilities, are caring for and educating the next generation.

# A Call to Action for the Future of Child Care and Early Learning

If the 117th Congress were to adopt the recommendations NAEYC has outlined, hundreds of thousands of children, families, and educators in this country would benefit, as well as their workplaces, schools, and the economy of both today and tomorrow. These actions represent critically important steps—yet they remain steps.

In order to fully deliver on the promise of high-quality early learning for all children, our country must prioritize and implement a bold family and values vision that is rooted in the early years by



## Early Childhood Educators: Vital and Valued

Because we know that our nation’s greatest successes are born of investments in our nation’s people, this effort would include a focus on lifting up early childhood educators by

- › Providing comprehensive scholarships for educators to support their access to accredited higher education programs for associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees in early childhood education
- › Stipulating a commitment to stay in early learning for a requisite number of years upon usage of the comprehensive scholarship
- › Embedding a phased-in, profession-determined baseline threshold of knowledge, skills, and competencies for early childhood educators that is aligned with compensation, in all federal and state funding streams

## Early Childhood Education: Success at Scale

Our country can achieve the outcomes and reap the rewards that would result from fully delivering on the promise of high-quality early learning at scale, when we are committed to

- › Fully funding foundational programs, including CCDBG, Head Start, and Early Head Start
- › Supporting full-day, full-year programs across settings that meet the needs of working families and support children's learning
- › Establishing and implementing an agreed-upon set of criteria that drive quality in their early learning and professional development systems across states and settings

NAEYC will continue to work with policy makers, families, educators, business leaders, economists, scientists, and researchers to bring us closer to fulfilling our mission of delivering on the promise of high-quality early learning for our children, our families, and our country.



<sup>1</sup> Public opinion poll, conducted August 6-12, 2015, by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) and Public Opinion Strategies (POS) on behalf of NAEYC. Details available at [www.naeyc.org/profession](http://www.naeyc.org/profession).

<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.