

QUALITY MATTERS CAMPAIGN

Campaign 180

Talking Points

Making the Case for Why Quality in Early Care and Education Matters

The following talking points were developed by the Kids Are Priority One Coalition to assist advocates in making the case with legislators about why the early years matter and explaining the link between quality in early care and education and healthy child development.

- **The quality of early care and education matters a great deal to children’s healthy development.** For our society to prosper in the future, children must have early experiences that support healthy intellectual, social, and emotional development. The early years are important in forming the architecture of a young child’s maturing brain—literally wiring it for all future learning.
- **Research shows strong links between quality early care and education and child development.** With an estimated 71% of Vermont’s young children in non-parental care for at least some of the day, the stakes are high.
- **According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), quality consists of:**
 - Positive and nurturing relationships among all children and adults;
 - A curriculum that promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive;
 - Teaching approaches that enhance each child’s learning and development goals;
 - Systemic and ongoing assessment of child progress;
 - Practices that ensure safety and promote good health;
 - A qualified, knowledgeable teaching staff;
 - Collaborative relationships with each child’s family;
 - Community relationships;
 - A safe and healthful environment; and
 - Strong leadership and management.

The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) also offers quality standards just for family child care programs. They include 289 standards divided into five content areas:

- Relationships;
 - The Environment;
 - Developmental Learning Activities;
 - Safety and Health; and
 - Professional and Business Practices.
- **The state of Vermont has defined quality in terms of STARS (Step Ahead Recognition System) and national accreditation. It has made a strong commitment to promoting both.**
 - STARS is Vermont's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). It offers early childhood educators and programs a means for moving along a continuum of quality. STARS also provides consumers with a way to measure quality.
 - The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association for Family Child Care offer an accreditation system, both of which are widely recognized as the "gold seal of approval" for quality early care and education programs.
 - **However, a relatively small percentage of regulated early care and education programs in Vermont are nationally accredited or have a STARS rating.**
 - Significant barriers related to funding and infrastructure (e.g. professional development opportunities) limit many early childhood providers from accessing the training and education needed to improve quality. (*See policy brief for details.*)
 - Low wages, coupled with few benefits, contribute to high turnover in a field where consistency of a child's caregivers and teachers is important for healthy development.
 - **There are solutions. The Kids Are Priority One Coalition's vision for Vermont is to overcome these barriers by making thoughtful investments and policy changes.**
 - During the 2010 legislative session, Rep. Bill Frank (Underhill) worked with the Kids Are Priority One Coalition on legislation (H.228) that called for a short-term legislative task force to identify barriers to improving quality, develop recommendations to eliminate those barriers and explore ways to pay for an increased public investment in quality. The House of Representatives' Human Services Committee directed Building Bright Futures (BBF) to undertake this work. Building Bright Futures will hire a consultant to work with the BBF State Council to complete this work in time for the 2013 legislative session. (*For more details, see Kids Are Priority One Coalition's policy recommendations below.*)
 - In the meantime, there are smaller steps that the legislature can take to improve the quality of early care and education. Some ideas being discussed include:
 - a. Increasing the number of child care licensors;
 - b. Adding a new type of provisional licensure to take into account experience and program quality; and
 - c. Eliminating two-year averaging of school's pre-k counts to encourage more school districts to partner with qualified community partners under Act 62.

- **Any solution must ensure that parents have choices in the setting (school, home or center-based) that best meets their child’s needs.**
- **Quality early care and education is cost-effective in the long run.**
 - There is now extensive research showing how comprehensive, high-quality early learning programs are cost-effective investments.
 - Economists Arthur Rolnick and Rob Grunewald write, “The evidence is clear that investments in ECD [early childhood development] for at-risk children pay a high public return....Compared with the billions of dollars spent each year on high-risk economic development schemes, an investment in ECD is a far better and far more secure economic development tool.”
 - According to economist Dr. James Heckman, “Investment in birth to five early education for disadvantaged children helps prevent the achievement gap, reduce the need for special education, increase the likelihood of healthier lifestyles, lower the crime rate and reduce overall social costs. In fact, every dollar invested in early childhood education produces a 10% per annum return on investment.”
 - Investing in pre-k programs can create cost efficiencies in future K-12 school budgets. Catching developmental delays or needs early on, reduces the need for remediation or special services later.
 - The transition for children from an early childhood program to the public school is smoother and efficiencies are created when early childhood educators and school teachers are communicating, using similar assessment tools and curriculums during the pre-k years.

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Policy Recommendations

In order to provide quality and stability in early care and education, we must recruit and retain a skilled workforce and support programs to meet quality standards. To this end, the Kids Are Priority One Coalition is pursuing the following recommendations:

1. Provide the **resources and incentives** necessary for early childhood professionals and programs to improve the quality of early care and education by:
 - a. Establishing a Quality Fund designed to:
 - i. Increase access to professional development and training opportunities to support early childhood professionals in their pursuit of an array of professional credentials and degrees as well as teacher licensure in Early Childhood Education;
 - ii. Help professionals and programs to reach and maintain high-quality standards;
 - iii. Provide resources to support ongoing evaluation of the quality of the early care and education system.

- b. Legislating incentives to increase the capacity of Vermont's higher education system to educate and train the early care and education workforce and make available teacher licensure opportunities;
 - c. Implementing a statewide educational loan forgiveness/repayment program and/or increasing available scholarships for early childhood educators (including early intervention and early childhood special education professionals);
 - d. Amending the Next Generation Initiative of Workforce Development legislation (Act 46, 2007) to allow for inclusion of the early education/after-school care workforce as a priority area.
2. Implementing the **public policies** needed to assure early care and education programs and early childhood educators meet **minimum quality and education standards** by:
- a. Linking all public funding for child development services to quality standards and linking compensation to training for early childhood educators;
 - b. Developing a statewide plan to ensure that early childhood educators earn a livable wage and have access to affordable health insurance;
 - c. Increasing the number of licensors within the state of Vermont's Child Development Division to reflect the national standard.
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Kids Are Priority One is Vermont's statewide early childhood coalition that mobilizes Vermonters to ensure that every child gets a good start.