SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO THRIVE

Children and families can thrive when supported by healthy environments, strong relationships, and access to quality early learning. A child’s healthy development largely depends on the socioeconomic well-being of their family and community, and having access to resources to support their optimal development. Positive relationships between children and their caregivers can support the well-being and resilience of both, as well as helping children build crucial brain connections. Children who have access to quality early learning opportunities such as preschool are more likely to enter school prepared for success in academics and throughout their lives. Support in these areas not only empowers children to grow and succeed through preschool but also gives families the tools they need to thrive.

SOUTH CAROLINA CHILDREN IN NEED

Unfortunately, many children and families in South Carolina currently do not have access to these protective factors. The percentage of SC children aged 5 and under who live in poverty is 23.2%. That threatens the healthy development of over 66,000 children. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic erased nearly a decade of progress in increasing preschool enrollment, leading to a full 88.9% of 3-year-olds and 57% of 4-year-olds who are not enrolled in any preschool program. Many families struggle to afford early care and education, with an average monthly childcare cost, regardless of quality, of $584 for infants and $500 for 4-year-olds. In addition, burnout from the pandemic and already low pay has led tens of thousands of early childhood workers across the country to leave their positions in recent years. Child care centers are currently understaffed 80%, and 50% of those centers now serve fewer children. This further reduces opportunities for families to find affordable and accessible child care in their communities.

TWO-GENERATION BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Effective, data-driven and equity-based policies can empower both parents and children through a two-generation approach to address economic challenges in a way that can have long-term benefits by increasing access to quality learning opportunities for children, and improving employment prospects for working families.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Improve pay and benefits for early care providers who support children aged birth to five.
2. Increase access to safe, affordable housing for families of young children.
3. Expand access to quality health care for all young children and their families.
4. Cultivate quality early care and education with age-appropriate curricula for all children aged birth to five.
5. Strengthen mental health supports for children from birth to age five, and to their caregivers and families.
6. Extend access to early care and education, family support, and early intervention services regardless of zip code.
7. Broaden access to early intervention services for children with special needs.
8. Support efforts to encourage and involve families as their child’s first and most important teacher.
9. Advance quality teacher preparation and professional development for early care providers.
10. Provide access to nutritious food for all children.
SC EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMON AGENDA

Dozens of community, provider and family advocates comprise the Early Childhood Common Agenda coalition.

References


