

Contact: Gina Contursi, Defending the Early Years, (917) 405-7680,
gina.contursi@gmail.com
David Monahan, CCFC, (617)-896-9397, david@commercialfreechildhood.org

**Early Childhood Experts Call On Policymakers
To Reject Online “Preschools”**

*Coalition of more than 100 advocates caution against marketing schemes falsely
advertised as preschool*

BOSTON – October 10, 2018 – Leading early childhood experts and advocates are urging government agencies and policymakers to reject online “preschools,” and instead invest in fully-funded, relationship-based, universal pre-kindergarten programs.

The advocates’ statement, co-authored by Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (CCFC) and Defending the Early Years (DEY), details how “virtual preschools” -- individual, computer-based instruction driven by algorithms -- deny children the hands-on, face-to-face school experiences that research shows is critical to both early learning and later-in-life success. The statement will be shared with local policymakers in all 50 states, and CCFC, DEY, and the Network for Public Education will be organizing their members to urge legislators to fund universal pre-K, not online “preschool.”

"All children should have access to high-quality, fully funded preschool," said Diane Levin, Professor of Early Childhood Education, at Boston University's Wheelock College. "Online ‘preschool’ lacks the concrete, hands-on social, emotional and intellectual educational components that are essential for quality learning in the early years. Further, online preschools are likely to exacerbate already existing inequalities in early education by giving low-income children superficial exposure to rote skills and ideas while more privileged children continue to receive developmentally sound experiences that provide a solid foundation for later academic success."

Recognizing the estimated \$70 billion a year “preschool market,” an increasing number of Silicon Valley companies with names like “K12 Inc.” and “CHALK” are selling families and policymakers the idea that kindergarten readiness can be transmitted through a screen. In 2015, the state of Utah sponsored the first state-funded online “preschool” of its kind, called UPSTART. Since then, thousands of families have enrolled in the program and the company has expanded pilot programs to at least seven other states including Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

“Allowing tech companies to push online preschools will lead to further marginalization of low-income families who already lack access to high-quality affordable child care,” said Dr. Denisha Jones, Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at Trinity Washington University and DEY Advisory Board member. “If the parents of Silicon Valley won’t put their own children in online preschool, why would we think this is good for other people’s children?”

Child development experts point to the American Academy of Pediatrics' [statement on play](#), which emphasizes the importance of strong caregiver-child relationships in very early learning experiences for promoting executive functioning skills in kids. Advocates are also concerned that computer-based instruction for very young children will make it harder for families to navigate screen time, something more than half of parents already say is difficult. Extended time on screens diminishes time spent on essential early learning experiences such as lap-reading, creative play, and healthy interactions with adults, and is linked with behavior problems, sleep deprivation, obesity, and delays in social-emotional development.

“It’s bad enough when commercial apps are falsely marketed as educational,” said Josh Golin, executive director of the Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood. “Policymakers shouldn’t exacerbate parents’ confusion by equating screen time with preschool. It’s time to say “no!” to EdTech lobbyists and fund what actually helps children thrive and learn.”

“Research consistently tells us that young children, particularly children from low-income families, need more time and space to do what they do best: play!” said Erika Christakis, author of *The Importance of Being Little*. “Rather than rush kids into the world of computer-based learning, policymakers should support efforts that give all children opportunities for creative, hands-on, and outdoor play. None of that essential social learning can happen when a young child is sitting in front of a screen.”

Added Peter Gray, Research Professor of Psychology at Boston College and author of *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*: "Young children are designed, by nature, to learn in joyful, playful ways through direct interaction with other, real children and adults. ‘Academics,’ abstracted from such experiences, only subvert their natural curiosity and humanity."

Other signatories to the letter include Roberta Golinkoff and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, co-authors of *Becoming Brilliant: What Science Tells us About Raising Successful Children*; Sherry Turkle, author of *Reclaiming Conversation*; Julie Nicholson, Ph.D., author of *Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Protective Factors in Young Children*; education historian Diane Ravitch of New York University, and the organizations Common Sense Media, Public Citizen, TRUCE (Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children’s Entertainment) and the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children.

To follow on Twitter and join the movement: @DEY_Project @commercialfree #RejectOnlinePreK

Defending the Early Years:

Defending the Early Years is a non-profit corporation working for a just, equitable, and quality early childhood education for every young child. DEY publishes reports, makes mini-documentaries, issues position statements, advocates on policy, and has an active website full of resources, blogs, and activist steps for early childhood educators. For more information visit www.deyproject.org or follow on Twitter @DEY_Project.

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood:

CCFC educates the public about commercialism's impact on kids' wellbeing and advocates for the end of child-targeted marketing (www.commercialfreechildhood.org and @commercialfree). CCFC is also home of the Children's Screen Time Action Network (<https://screentimenetwork.org>), a coalition of educators, advocates and practitioners working to promote a healthy childhood by reducing the amount of time kids spend with digital devices.

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