

## Nancy Carlsson-Paige and Denisha Jones: Defend the Early Years

The future of the United States depends on the well-being of the nation's children and their ability to grow up and become citizens who can work to solve the problems of our future. Research shows that early childhood education enhances the life prospects of children and has a high benefit-cost ratio for society's investment.

The next president must commit to providing access to high-quality affordable care from infancy that includes prenatal support to all families. We cannot allow a parent's income or ZIP code to determine whether a child receives high-quality or inferior early care and education.



As the next president makes universal care and education a reality, we insist that they listen to early childhood experts who understand what constitutes high quality early education.



The educational policies in place today that focus on academic standards and testing of young children were developed without the input of early childhood professionals, and as a result they are wildly out of step with the best practices of the field and the knowledge base that informs them. Young children learn skills and concepts on very different paths and timetables; one size does not fit all with young kids. Decades of research and theory tell us that children learn best through active, exploratory, creative play, and relationships with caring adults. The overemphasis on academic standards and testing and the belief that technology can substitute for face-to-face interactions must be replaced by a more informed, developmentally appropriate approach to educating young children.

In addition to positive early learning experiences, young children who experience trauma and adverse childhood experiences need mental health support to build resiliency that can mitigate the harmful effects of traumatic childhoods. And finally, early childhood teachers, whose work is vital to the nation's health and survival, must be compensated at a level similar to other professionals. ■

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