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North Carolina Association for
the Education of Young Children

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Five Things That Matter, No Matter What



NCAEYC is highlighting this excerpt from an NAEYC blog post, co-authored by Lauren Hogan, Senior Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at NAEYC, and Elizabeth DiLauro, Director of Advocacy at ZERO TO THREE, to remind us of the **Five Things That Matter, Now Matter What**.

1

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Science shows that a baby's brain makes more than 1 million new neural connections per second in the first few years of life. During this time, babies discover the world through experiences with parents and other caregivers, shaping how they learn and view the world. These experiences—both positive and negative—influence the connections being made in their brains, shaping how they will manage situations as a toddler, preschooler, and beyond.

The relationships babies have with trusted adults are critical because they affect the actual wiring taking place in their brains. Parents, as the saying goes, are their children's first and most important teachers. Yet with more than 60 percent of mothers of young children in the workforce, a diverse range of early childhood educators and child care providers also play a critical role in ensuring that children, supported by their families, have the early experiences they need for strong cognitive, physical, social and emotional, and language and literacy development. When babies receive consistent, nurturing, and quality care, they build the necessary foundation to boost their chances to live up to their potential and their promise.

2

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS MATTER

The role of early childhood educators in delivering on this promise is undeniable. Early childhood educators perform complex, demanding, and valuable work. Supported, skilled, knowledgeable, and diverse early childhood educators are the linchpin in high-quality early learning and it is why [Power to the Profession](#), a national, state, and local collaboration, of which both NAEYC and ZERO TO THREE are a part, seeks to establish a shared framework of career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards and compensation that reflects the critical role early childhood educators play in delivering on the promise of high-quality early childhood education

3

QUALITY MATTERS

Making sure babies and young toddlers—whose brains are growing more rapidly than at any other later time in their lives—receive the quality care necessary to put them on a path toward future success should be one of the country's top economic priorities. We must act under a shared understanding, based on research, science, and evidence, that investing in equitable access to high-quality early care and learning will make America brighter, stronger and more competitive. After all, today's diverse group of young children are the nation's future generation of workers, leaders, and innovators. In fact, [a recent report](#) by the Council for a Strong America finds that 92 percent of business decision-makers agree that early life experiences directly influence the social and emotional skills needed for the 21st century economy. As one leader put it: "Character is built in the first years of life and it is absolutely necessary for life success."

Five Things That Matter, No Matter What

(continued)

4

THE IMPACTS OF POVERTY MATTER

Keeping children out of poverty is also key to an economy's long-term health and wellness. As Janet Yellen, Chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve System, noted during the conference, adults who grew up worrying about food, an unstable family, or safety are less likely to be employed, have a stable income or an ability to pay monthly bills compared to adults who had fewer stressors growing up. We know that the effects these types of environmental stresses—hunger, fear and harm—are toxic to growing brains. When stress is the "input," the outcomes are likely to be less than optimal. Poverty can literally get under the skin, undermining development in key regions of the brain including self-regulation and learning, memory and language, and emotional control.

5

EQUITABLE ACCESS MATTERS

Quality, affordable child care for young children can change the trajectory for many children and their families living in or near poverty. It enables their parents to work, relieving the economic instability that contributes to a stressful family environment. At the same time, it provides a responsive, enriching environment that meshes with the strengths of the family to support early development. When very young children are nurtured and cared for by loving adults, who honor and respect the language and culture of the child's home, the negative effects of poverty are mitigated. These responsive relationships serve as a buffer to the harm caused by environmental and physical stress and supports healthy brain development—which is the key to all future learning.



PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, RESOURCES MATTER.

We must commit to making the public investments needed to create a child care system that ensures it is economically feasible to provide high-quality services for young children and families, regardless of income or zip code, state or setting.

Not only will young children benefit from close relationships with well-qualified and well-compensated child care providers who are culturally and linguistically responsive, but we all stand to benefit when our diverse future workforce – today's young children – arrive at school as eager, confident learners, prepared for future success.

[Click here to see the original blog post](#)