Table of Contents

Be a Champion for Early Learning 3
Legislative Advocacy 4
Media Advocacy 5
Framing the Issue 6
Communicating with Elected Officials 7
Advocating throughout the Legislative Process 8
Early Learning Talking Points 9
Where Idaho Stands 10
Desired Outcomes 11
Be a Champion for Early Learning

Public policies at the national, state and local levels have a tremendous impact on the foundations needed to ensure quality early learning programs for all children and compensation for early learning professionals. Idaho AEYC has been at the forefront of supporting initiatives and policies that improve the lives of our youngest children and their families. Learn how we can become a unified voice for high-quality early learning for all children in Idaho.

**Advocacy** builds support for an issue, cause, idea or policy.

**Lobbying** is communicating with elected officials to influence their actions regarding a specific piece of legislation.

Advocacy activities that are not lobbying:

- Invite a legislator to visit your program and hear about the work being done.
- Provide a policymaker with information or educational materials on a topic.
- Talk with the media about a specific social issue.
- Track legislative positions and voting records.
The main goal of legislative advocacy is working with elected officials to educate them about policies or programs and to inform them of the impact of the program in their home district. Advocates can educate decision-makers and suggest policies that would benefit their community. Legislative advocacy activities can also include lobbying on specific bills or requested funding levels.

Strategies

- Communicate with legislators and staff through letters, e-mails, phone calls, or personal visits.
- Testify before relevant legislative committees.
- Meet in person with legislator or staff.
- Work with legislators to compel agency administrators to adopt your proposal.
- Invite legislators to visit your program and see how policies affect people in your community.
Media Advocacy

Use media to increase public awareness and influence broader public debate about early childhood issues. Keeping your issue in the news creates public recognition and support, thereby increasing its practical and political importance.

Media Strategies

Express your point of view through letters to the editor and call-in opportunities.

Build media relationships. Get to know reporters and local radio show hosts to build interest in early childhood issues.

Share local media coverage with elected officials from your community.

Contact local radio and television stations about appearing on local talk shows or public affairs programs to share your expertise.

Invite reporters to visit your program to see first-hand the positive impact it has on young children.

Use social media. Be genuine - let your personality show. Be reliable - share quality content from trusted sources. Get social - engage your followers.
Framing the Issue

Engage the Audience

Identify the audience you are trying to influence. Choose information and language that will resonate with the audience and help them understand the issues.

State the Problem

Clearly and concisely define the problem. Choose the most compelling component of the issue for each audience. Think about:

- What is the problem?
- Whom does the issue affect?
- Why does the issue need to be addressed at this time?
- Where is the problem greatest?
- When is intervention needed before there are negative consequences?
- How are children, families and the community being affected?
- What local data can you provide to emphasize how the problem is affecting the community?

Inform Others about Potential Solutions

Be prepared to suggest and discuss practical solutions. Consider your specific recommendations, the evidence you have to support them and how these solutions might be funded.

Call to Action

The call to action required will vary according to the audience and the issue at hand, but make sure to clearly define the “ask.” The action requested should be specific and gives your audience an immediate way to get involved.
Policymakers care about issues that affect their constituents and they respond to concise, persuasive arguments that are easily communicated.

Correspondence from constituents reminds elected officials that the public is tracking specific issues, legislation and their voting records.

Whenever communicating with legislators through a phone call, letter or email:
- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- Keep written correspondence to one page and phone calls to five minutes.
- When addressing a specific piece of legislation, refer to the bill number.
- Include factual and, if possible, local information and examples that support your viewpoint.
- Share stories about children and their families and how an issue affects them is very effective at building support for your position.
- Include a call to action, specifying what you want the lawmaker to do.
- Practice with another person to identify any areas where your message isn’t clear or effective.

To find your legislators’ contact information visit: legislature.idaho.gov/howtocontactlegislators

Leverage your early learning knowledge to educate and build a relationship with your elected official.
Advocating Throughout the Legislative Process

Thousands of bills are introduced at the state and federal levels each year; most never become law. By voicing support to policy makers for bills related to early childhood issues, you can play a major role in the policy-making process by helping to move bills forward and expand awareness of the issues.

KEY TIMES TO CONTACT DECISION-MAKERS

When a bill is introduced, write and call your legislators. This lets them know the issue is important to you. Ask your legislators to speak with members of the relevant committees working on the bill.

When a bill is passed out of committee and is read, discussed and amended on the floor of the initiating chamber, you have the opportunity to expand your outreach to your legislator via telephone, letter or email.

As the bill moves forward in the second chamber, begin to extend your lobbying activities to include the governor’s office. Executive support can make or break a bill.

You may have the opportunity to testify before the committee that is responsible for the bill at a committee hearing. If your legislator is on the relevant committee, contact him or her prior to a committee vote. If your legislator is not on the committee, ask him or her to speak to the committee chair.
The quality of a child’s early learning affects their learning for life. Quality early learning opportunities help our children enter school ready to learn and prepared to achieve. By age 5, 90% of our brains are developed. If a child enters kindergarten behind, they will most likely stay behind.

Every $1 invested in quality early learning saves taxpayers $7-13 in public costs. Children in quality early learning programs are less likely to repeat grades, require special education services and need remediation. They are more likely to have grade-level reading skills by third grade, graduate from high school, continue with higher education and have higher earning ability.

Access to quality early learning improves reading skills. High-quality early learning programs expose children to enriching conversation, interactive storybook reading, learning language through rhyme, alliteration, sound matching and alphabet activities. Strong early literacy skills will support children’s ability to learn to read when they enter school.

The child care sector has a history of low profitability. This is due to high labor expenses required by high staff/child ratios, labor costs constitute the majority of expenses for a child care business. Programs pay low wages, resulting in a less skilled workforce and high staff turnover.

Invest in early childhood learning. Supporting the early learning field promotes professional development, employee retention and encourages child care providers and early educators to make improvements to provide higher quality child care.
Where Idaho Stands

Roughly **139,500** children under age 6 in Idaho.¹

More than half - about **79,000** - live in households in which both parents work outside the home.¹

**1 OF ONLY 4**
States where 3- and 4-year olds have no access to state-funded preschool.²* Private child care programs serving as most preschool programs.

Idaho ranks 52 in the country in regards to state child care licensing oversight and regulations.³

Only **51%**
of Idaho’s children began kindergarten with grade-level reading skills.⁴


*Districts are required to offer preschool programs for children with special needs.
Desired Outcomes

Special interest and activities to promote quality pre-elementary school opportunities, increased access to quality child care for all socio-economic populations and resources, support and information for working families.

Increased community and public support for quality early learning programs for all of Idaho’s children.

Support for early learning (Pre-K Programs) to build the economy of Idaho through enabling a qualified and educated workforce.

Establish small business collaboration with child care resource and referral programs to assist small child care businesses in employee retention, stability and strengthening family programs.

Expand public and private investment in the early education sector.

Build on State and City Legislation

There is considerable support to improve the quality of early learning and the conditions of child care throughout Idaho. At the city and state regulatory levels, there are varying policies implemented throughout the state intended to regulate child care facilities.

Idaho regulations are an assortment of policies that need to be strengthened and standardized. This will ensure the best health and safety of our youngest children while also providing an age appropriate and optimal learning environment.

Recognize Voluntary Efforts

A variety of early learning organizations have come together to promote the importance of early learning and healthy childhoods for the future development of Idaho’s children.

- Over 100 programs are enrolled in IdahoSTARS’ Steps to Quality program; signaling the ambition of child care providers to improve quality, safety and early learning.
- Over 4,500 child care workers are enrolled in the IdahoSTARS Professional Development System, a program designed to provide education training and resources to child care providers.
- Through the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 24 child care programs in the state have received national accreditation which is the gold standard of high-quality early learning.
- Thirteen Idaho Head Start and Early Head Start programs serve over 5,150 children in 151 communities. The programs work to increase the school readiness and social competence of young children in low-income families.