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Advocacy from a 360° Approach

by Dawn Kurtz

When children receive the highest quality education—at the earliest possible age—they are well positioned to reach their potential: social-emotionally, behaviorally and academically. Time and time again, we see the evidence of the positive relationship between strong early learning experiences and all-around success—validated through research, classroom anecdotes and long-term success stories, such as increased high-school graduation rates. Yet, despite these outcomes and our resounding positive connection to them, we still have a long way to go for quality early learning to be an assumed milestone for every child.

At Child360, we believe every child deserves to thrive in school and life and this trajectory starts with high-quality early learning experiences. We use evidence-based approaches to support teachers, administrators and parents—adults who significantly impact children's development during this critical time of development—and to advocate for policies that put our children first.

What We Advocate For

High-quality early learning starts with supported early educators—the everyday heroes and brain builders of our children. Birth through age 5 is a critical period in a child's life, where their brains are growing at their most rapid rates, and they are establishing connections about themselves and the world around them. These moments are foundational. We must empower lawmakers, the decision-makers, to invest in

early educators, in order to build their capacities as nurturers, brain builders and leaders, so they can successfully guide children through this critical process of development and self-discovery. We take a 360-degree approach to make this happen, combining cutting-edge training opportunities with ongoing coaching, so teachers can advance their knowledge, understanding and responsiveness to crucial aspects of today's classrooms, including cultural competency, challenging behaviors and trauma-informed care.

By providing professional development for early educators, we are building their capacity to provide intentional and tailored early learning experiences for our youngest learners, giving them the best foundation for life. This approach is critical and also requires funding and support at the local, state and national levels—that is where Child360 and our army of early educators come in.

Advocacy Driven by Research

Everything Child360 does is grounded in field research, to ensure that we capture both progress and success in elevating classroom standards and, at the same time, identify the often-overlooked needs of early learners. We involve early educators every step of the way, from collecting feedback from them first-hand, all the way to bringing them to our state capitol in Sacramento to meet with lawmakers and share their stories, challenges and the transforming impact of early learning.

Case Study 1: "Voices from the Field" Provider Survey

Most recently, and in partnership with Early Edge California, we secured direct feedback from over 100 ECE providers to learn about the most relevant issues facing early education teachers and administrators in Los Angeles, one of the largest and most diverse counties in the country. Our comprehensive "Voices from the Field" report gives a real-life deep dive into workforce trends and challenges. This information guides Child360's ongoing policy and advocacy work and informs the professional development and training offered to teachers and administrators in our network.



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Dawn A. Kurtz, Ph.D., is the chief research officer for Child360, leading research innovation to improve child outcomes. Kurtz played a key role in the development and implementation of multiple Quality Rating and Improvement System projects at the local and state level. Kurtz spent several years at First 5 LA, where she played an integral role in the conceptualization, planning, development and oversight of initiatives designed to improve the well-being of young children and their families. Kurtz has also studied the developmental consequences of child abuse and neglect and taught college courses in psychology and child development.

Already in 2020, there is exciting momentum happening for early education in California. Child360's survey results indicated a need for more teacher training and professional development specific to children with challenging behaviors and those impacted by traumatic experiences. We have since taken these results to the Capitol and had resounding attention from the lawmakers with whom we have met. When we accurately represent the voices and real experiences of early educators we are able to drive real, systematic change. We can already see in Governor Gavin Newsom's budget proposal, his inclusion of trauma-informed care as a priority item to better support California's teachers.

Case Study 2: On the Ground at the Capitol

Year-round, our policy team meets with elected officials, bringing parents and educators alongside, to share the tremendous impact of quality early learning on their lives. During key budget cycles, conferences and legislative hearings, you will often find Child360, educators and parents united, waving support signs during rallies at the Capitol, speaking one-on-one with legislators, and providing public comment at budget and policy hearings. These days at the Capitol are just the punctuation on the ongoing work these parents and educators do all year long on behalf of their children and communities. Leading up to these meetings, Child360 hosts Community Ambassador trainings all across Los Angeles county, as a mechanism to build community members' capacity and empower them to write letters to elected officials and share their own compelling messages when presenting to an engaged audience. Amplifying the voices of early education providers and the parents who are impacted by our services allows us to continue to build upon the momentum to increase investments in early education, so that every child has the opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

This is a crucial, positive moment in California, with a lot at stake for our youngest children. Our voices are being heard, and California is taking action. Governor Newsom's newest proposed budget receives praise for taking a comprehensive approach to early education, offering unprecedented focus on early learning, with increased funding for 10,000 new state preschool slots and significant investments in developing a well-trained workforce. This is great news and it can be directly tied back to our collective advocacy work.

Be Informed

It takes a steady drumbeat of support—an engaged and empowered early education workforce, involved parents and active community, a coordinated advocacy plan backed by sound research, and a commitment from elected officials and the broader community to prioritize quality early educa-

tion—to ensure that children can be happy, healthy and ready to learn. Our collective voice enables more teachers to grow professionally and for strong early learning opportunities to be accessible for all children. To build this support, we created Child360's Advocacy Platform (<https://child360.org/advocates/take-action/>), where you can sign up for alerts, search legislation topics using key words, and get into contact with elected officials or candidates in your area.

Advocacy is the linchpin to strengthening the village, and creating the support we all want for our children. When we listen to one another and work together, we build a world that puts children first.



Editor's Note: This article was written prior to the Coronavirus global crisis. The author adds this point:

"This topic's importance is magnified given the unprecedented educational environment we face as a nation. Early care and education is always an essential support to families; and at a time like this, it is a critical need for the families who are on the frontlines of helping keep our world running – health care workers, pharmacists, supermarket clerks, public safety officers and more. To make sure the needs of educators are heard and met during this time, Child360 distributed provider impact surveys in unison with partners throughout the country; including NAEYC and various county offices throughout Southern California. Now, more than ever, we need to advocate for policies that support the best interests of children, families and the ECE workforce.

With this fervor, we also must fight to provide professional development opportunities for our essential early care and education workforce to hone-in on their craft as other valued professions. For this reason, Child360 launched its online learning platform, Child360 Learning (<https://learning.child360.org/#/public-dashboard>), so early educators can learn and grow professionally in the comfort of their own home. The system's launch coincides with these unprecedented times, where educators can make the most of being at home, and become experts in areas most important to them.