

IN DEFENSE OF CHILDHOOD

A Campaign to Restore Creative Play and Hands-on Learning in Preschools and Kindergartens

Child advocates must consider all factors that interfere with optimal development and press for circumstances that allow each child to fully reap the advantages associated with play. — *American Academy of Pediatrics, October 2006*

The last decade has seen radical changes in early childhood education. The achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers and new insights from brain research showing the importance of learning in the early years have focused public attention on early childhood, from birth to age six, and sparked a national campaign for school readiness.

Preparing children for school and improving the quality of early childhood education are critical goals. But the means to achieving them now commonplace in preschool and kindergarten—including academic drills, scripted teaching, and standardized testing—are misguided and detrimental to the needs of children and society. Flexibility, perseverance, empathy, curiosity, social awareness, and resilience are best developed in young children through activities that are often dismissed as “only play.” A body of compelling research and pedagogical experience show that open-ended, creative play is essential for all aspects of children’s development, including their academic success. Yet, sadly and dangerously, exploratory play is missing from the lives of growing numbers of our youngest citizens.

Our purpose is to broaden and refocus public conversation about early childhood and its long-term implications for a child’s life and for society; to restore imaginative play and hands-on, experiential learning as central activities in kindergartens and preschools; and to support stable, loving relationships with all adults in children’s lives.

To ensure that the education of young children is in accordance with the precepts of healthy child development, we have set forth the following goals:

- to develop and implement a public information, engagement, and advocacy campaign, with outreach to educators, parents, policymakers, and others concerned about the well-being of our nation’s children;
- to cultivate multi-faceted media coverage—including print, broadcast, and web-based—that focuses on the broader picture of childhood and the need for creative play and hands-on learning; and
- to realign the education and professional development of early childhood educators with the tenets of experiential learning.

New York Voices of Childhood

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Join the Campaign

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What You Can Do:

- 1. Sign up with the Alliance for Childhood and let us know you are interested in the campaign in defense of childhood. We will keep you informed of new developments. Contact us through our web site: www.allianceforchildhood.org.**

- 2. Begin organizing in your community:**
 - Find like-minded individuals or organizations in your schools, neighborhoods, faith-based centers, children's museums, pediatricians' offices—concerned parents, grandparents, educators, and others are all around you. Talk and listen.**

 - Discuss the importance of open-ended play with your pediatrician. See the October 2006 report by the American Academy of Pediatrics for a clear statement of the ways play is essential to children's health: www.aap.org/pressroom/play-public.htm.**

 - Organize conversations about play and childhood in your community. It could be a single meeting in your living room or at the coffee shop or local library, or a study group that meets regularly. There's a wealth of material on the Alliance for Childhood web site to help get things going.**

 - Help distribute the Alliance's Call to Action on the Education of Young Children. It has been signed by many of the country's leading educators, pediatricians, and child psychiatrists. See our web site.**

 - Approach your local PTA about your concerns. Be sure to let your teachers and principals know. Often they hear only from parents who want children to learn earlier and faster.**

 - Keep us informed of how you're doing. Let us know how we can help.**

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