

Lindsey Ramsey, Assistant Director of Policy and Practice.  
Read to Succeed: Early Childhood Education and its Effects on Childhood Literacy  
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Good morning everyone,

My name is Lindsey Ramsey, I serve as the Assistant Director of Policy and Practice for Trying Together. Trying Together is a non-profit early childhood advocacy organization that supports the needs and rights of all children, families, and the early childhood professionals who interact with them. We see out our mission of supporting high-quality care and education for young children by providing advocacy, community resources, professional growth opportunities and much more. Trying Together works regionally (in Southwestern Pennsylvania) and takes its expertise and models to statewide and national audiences. In addition, we serve as a principle partner of the Early Learning PA coalition, supporting statewide campaigns dedicated to advancing equity and access to high quality early learning opportunities for children and families across the commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Like many of my colleagues and those who have spoken today, I have had first hand experience of witnessing the great impact that accessible high-quality early childhood education has on children, families, and our communities. A child's environment and experiences play an important role in shaping their brain development. Supportive environments help children learn new skills. When children are in an environment where they are loved, taken care of, and adults are there to motivate and encourage them, they will be more likely to thrive in all areas of development.

The brain pathways underlying communication skills are being built early in life, these neural connections begin prenatally! Active participation in communicating (both talking and listening) during the brain's early periods of plasticity will provide young children with strong brain pathways for communication skills for the rest of their lives. A child's brain is like a sponge and they are rapidly learning from the interactions and environments they are exposed to, and that is why "high quality" interactions and environments matter so much! The human brain has the ability to develop in any environment, but the quality of the environment has the potential to impact how we learn, process, cope, and so much more. Just as high-quality environments can have a positive impact on a child's development, low quality environments or traumatic experiences can have a negative impact on our children.

In my years as an early childhood educator, I assisted a colleague in opening a childcare facility located in Homewood, Pennsylvania. Her vision was to provide the most vulnerable children and families in this community with a safe, high quality early learning environment. I remember caring for a little girl around the age of four that came off very timid and withdrawn. We noticed right away that she was experiencing developmental delays and we began to work with her family to seek out the support services she needed. One day as we took the class for a nature walk, we passed a group of row homes. The little girl immediately pointed out her house, and told us that is where she lived, along with telling us that she had to sleep in the bath tub

sometimes. I was very puzzled upon why she would say that, so when we made our way back to the center I asked one of my colleagues what she meant by “sleeping in the bathtub”. I was told that sleeping in a bathtub was a form of protection while avoiding gunfire, and that gun violence occurred often in their community. I was shocked, as I realized, that those experiences of trauma have become normalcy for a child so young. I was shaken because an innocent child had to be constantly worried with the instinct of survival at the age of 4. I was heartbroken because I knew that these worries, were ultimately impacting her development. From that moment on as an educator, I began to realize the importance of maintaining a high quality and nurturing environment for young children, because the environments that I was creating, may have been a safe haven for the children and families within the community.

These safe havens that early childhood educators create support a positive developmental trajectory from the early childhood years and beyond. As children navigate through these environments they are fostering critical developmental skills, and literacy and language are amongst those skills that are first developed and utilized throughout all aspects of life.

Mentioned on the National Center for Families, “Families Learning Conference 2022”  
Candy Magaña (Dir. Of Health Advancement, Innovation & Training from Humana)  
referenced a survey done by [Wisconsin Literacy](#)

- “Literacy skills are the strongest predictor of health status, more than age, income, employment status, education level or race/ ethnic group”

Having access to interactions and environments that support strong development of these skills, in turn supports equitable opportunities for citizens within our communities. These opportunities need to occur early! Our early childhood programs are strong resources in providing this critical work that help children thrive. Unfortunately, high quality early childhood services are not accessible to all children and families, due to issues such as childcare deserts, workforce shortages, and affordability for families, which you will hear more about from my colleagues speaking today.

Highly quality early childhood education is rooted in the work of the professionals and the environments that they create every day. The work of early childhood education and its professionals has historically lacked adequate investments, and we are seeing the fallback of the collapse of a system that supports our communities. I call upon all listening ears today to support local, state and federal investments, adequate compensation for early childhood professionals, resources, and creative solutions to address the challenges that the early childhood sector is facing now. We need long term investments to stabilize and grow the work of a field that is supporting our communities. The future of equity for our children and families is dependent upon this work. Please support the work of the early childhood field.

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