



Working to support and nurture the rights and needs of young children

MOBILIZING KIT

**For Parents and Teachers
Concerned about
What's Happening in Our
Early Childhood Classrooms
(Preschool through 3rd Grade)**

www.deyproject.org

Defending the Early Years is a non-profit project of the Survival Education Fund, Inc., a 501(c)3 organization





Introduction to the DEY Mobilizing Kit

Parents and teachers across the country are concerned about what is happening in their school's early childhood classrooms. In many schools, our youngest children (ages birth to 8 or 3rd grade) are exposed to:

- push-down academics and teaching strategies that are inappropriate for children of their age;
- an emphasis on testing;
- fewer opportunities to explore and learn through play;
- and, recently, the impact of the Common Core State Standards, resulting in the teaching of specific facts and skills by a certain age, often through direct instruction.

Defending the Early Years (DEY) seeks to rally parents and educators to take action on these policies affecting the education of young children, by encouraging them to speak out with well-reasoned arguments against inappropriate standards, assessments, and classroom practices.

This Mobilizing Kit includes:

How to plan and host a successful informational meeting

- Steps to take before, during and after the meeting
- Power Point presentation, "Young Children in Jeopardy," to show at the meeting
- Flyer to advertise the meeting
- Sample email to promote the meeting
- Sample meeting agendas
- Meeting sign-in sheet
- How to write an effective letter to the editor or to decision-makers

Resources

- Information about applying for a DEY Action Grant
- Fact Sheet on the Common Core
 - ◊ Six Reasons to Reject Common Core State Standards for Grades K-3
 - ◊ Six Principles to Guide Policy
- When Kindergarten Testing is Out of Hand (*courtesy of the Alliance for Childhood*)



Working to support and nurture the rights and needs of young children

What is the problem?

In many early childhood classrooms, the current emphasis on standards and testing has led to a focus on assessing children at the expense of meeting their developmental needs and teaching them meaningful content. Increased academic demands have led to the loss of play and activity-based, hands-on experiences that young children need in order to lay the foundation for later school success. The over-use of standards and assessment stifles children's natural love of learning, their opportunity to develop imagination, critical thinking, and creative problem solving skills. Worst of all, the heaviest burden from this premature academic focus falls on children who live in poverty and who attend schools in low-income communities.

What is the answer?

1. Eliminate labeling and ranking of children based on standardized tests.
2. Use assessments that are ongoing and evolving and connected closely to observations of children, their development and learning, and to a child-centered curriculum.
3. Provide classrooms where teachers engage in well-thought out and intentional extensions/expansions of children's play and learning in ways that demonstrate knowledge and respect for each child's uniqueness.
4. Provide children with literacy experiences that include storytelling, quality children's literature, and dramatic reenactments that grow out of their experiences rather than activities that isolate and drill discrete skills.
5. See and appreciate what children *can* do and understand without focusing on learning everything earlier.
6. Provide a school environment that respects the language and culture of children and their families, encourages families to take ownership, and insures that their history and experiences are included and valued.
7. Offer school schedules that provide ample time for families and school personnel to meet and work together.
8. Realize the critical role of early childhood teachers, whose work is as important as that of those who teach PhD candidates, and compensate them as such.
9. Remember that children are intrinsically active learners from the time they are born and that learning happens in and out of a school building in unique ways.
10. Provide children and families with access to high quality, affordable child care and after-school care.

What can we do together?

Take this information to your neighbor, children's teachers, parent groups, school board and legislative bodies. Ask them to support efforts to bring best practice back to the education of young children. Stay informed and involved with the organizations that advocate for young children - such as Defending the Early Years (deyproject.org), Alliance for Childhood (allianceforchildhood.org), Save Our Schools (saveourschoolsmarch.org) and Parents Across America (parentsacrossamerica.org).

What can families do at home?

- Provide young children with space and time to play at home and in the neighborhood.
- Read good quality children's books and limit screen time.
- Resist reinforcing the school's agenda - drilling for skills - and replace it with opportunities for meaningful learning.



Working to support and nurture the rights and needs of young children

HOW TO PLAN & HOST A SUCCESSFUL INFORMATIONAL MEETING





PLANNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

First Steps

- 1. Clarify your message.** Come up with three or four sentences that clearly state your position and your concerns. What are you FOR, as well as what are you against?
- 2. Decide on the purpose of the meeting?** Are you hoping to pull together a core group of concerned parents/educators who will help you spread the word or do you want to reach decision-makers, such as school principals, superintendents, members of the school board, elected officials? The tone of the meeting will be different if you are “preaching to the choir” or if you are starting a conversation with decision-makers who may either not be as informed as you are or who may have different opinions.
- 3. Choose a date and time.** Consider holding two meetings – one during the day and one in the evening to encourage more participation. If you are targeting parents or teachers, check the school calendar to be sure that your meeting doesn’t conflict with a big school event, a day with no classes, conference days, etc. Give yourself enough time to publicize the meeting.
- 4. Choose a location.** Consider a “neutral” place, such as a room at the public library, a meeting place at a school or town hall, or even at a local coffee shop, especially if you are inviting people whom you don’t know. If you are inviting people you know, such as parents of your children’s classmates, it’s fine to hold the meeting at your home.
- 5. Arrange for any AV equipment** that you might need, such as a microphone. If you are going to show a Power Point presentation, have a computer with Power Point software installed available, as well as a place to show it, such as a screen or blank wall. Be sure that you (or someone else) knows how to run it! In fact, do a run through well before the meeting starts.



Publicize the Meeting

1. **Compose an email** briefly explaining your concerns (see sample email in this kit), announcing the meeting, and mentioning the location, time, and date. Ask people who receive it to pass it on to friends (“guerilla marketing” such as this is crucial!). Decide if you want people to RSVP, send regrets, or just show up.
2. **Publicize on social media.** Start a Facebook page or website. (Weebly, www.weebly.com, is a simple website design program).
3. **Blog** at www.blogger.com; <http://wordpress.com> or www.blogspot.com.
4. Start a **Twitter** account. Sign up for Twitter at www.twitter.com.
5. **Post signs** about the meeting at your school, grocery store, or other public location (sample enclosed in this kit).
6. Make personal **phone calls to key participants**.
7. Publicize in your **school print or online newsletter**.
8. Publicize in your **local print or online newsletter** such as Patch (visit www.patch.com to find yours). They are often hungry for local news.

The Day of the Meeting

1. **Check the set-up of the room.** Are there enough (or too many) chairs? Are the microphone and projector working? Is there water for the speakers? Do you have handouts, sign-in sheets, and printed agendas? Do you need to put up signs near the entrance to direct people to the correct room? Are you offering refreshments, water, and/or coffee?
2. Arrange for **someone to take minutes**.
3. **Arrange for someone else to take a few photos**.



At the Meeting

1. Begin the meeting **on time**. Announce the time you plan to end the meeting.
2. **Introductions**. Thank people for coming. If the group is small enough, ask people to introduce themselves and perhaps, for parents, to mention the schools, grades, and/or ages of their children or for educators, their schools and what age/grade they teach. If it's a larger group, perhaps ask for a show of hands – how many are parents? How many are teachers?
3. **State the purpose** of the meeting and give an overview of the agenda.
4. Establish **the rules of order**. How will questions be asked – written or raise hands? Will there be a time limit on responses?
5. **Maintain focus**. If someone goes off on a tangent, keep the conversation on track.
6. At the end of the meeting, **summarize all decisions and tasks**.
7. Assign **action items**.
8. Schedule a **follow-up meeting**, if required.
9. **End on time**

After the Meeting

1. Send **minutes** of the meeting within a couple of days. Be sure to include the date, time, and location of the next meeting. Add bullet points of next steps and who has volunteered to do them.
2. Send **brief updates** of anything that has been accomplished between the meetings.
3. Publicize a summary of the meeting (see “Publicize the Meeting” section). Send a photo of the meeting to your local print or online newsletter, summarizing what was discussed.



To show at your meeting, a Power Point presentation, entitled **“Young Children in Jeopardy: The Growing Crisis in Early Childhood Education,”** is available:

- on the Defending the Early Years website
(<http://deyproject.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/dey-power-point-presentation-4-2.pptx>)
- on You Tube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwsTO6pIO-g)

If you need a DVD version of the Power Point, please contact DEY Executive Director, Geralyn Bywater McLaughlin at geralynbywater@gmail.com

This presentation effectively highlights the problem and suggests what advocates can do about it.

YOUNG CHILDREN IN JEOPARDY

**The Growing Crisis in Early Childhood Education
(Preschool through 3rd Grade)
and What Parents & Teachers Can Do About It**





As a parent or teacher, are you worried about inappropriate early childhood education policies in your school, such as

- *Push-down academics?*
- *Too much testing?*
- *Too little time for play?*
- *The impact of the Common Core State Standards?*

Come to a

DEFENDING THE EARLY YEARS INFORMATIONAL MEETING

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Location: _____

As concerned parents and teachers, we are worried about the impact of these policies and procedures on the healthy growth and development of our young children. We are forming an advocacy committee to study the effects of these policies and to find ways to make our concerns known. Please come!

For more information, please contact:





Sample Email To Fellow Parents or Teachers

Subject: Concerned about our kindergarten--too little play and too much 1st grade-like work? Come to an Informational Meeting on Monday, May 1 at 7 pm

Dear Kindergarten Parents,

As a parent of a kindergartner at Springfield Elementary, are you worried about inappropriate early childhood education policies at our school, such as:

- Push-down academics?
- Too much testing?
- Too little time for play?
- The impact of the Common Core State Standards?

My kindergartner, William, already “hates school” --and it pains me to see this happening to him.

As concerned parents, let's meet together to discuss our mutual concerns. Perhaps we can work together to explore ways to make these concerns known.

Please come to an informational meeting at the Springfield Public Library (1234 Oak St.) on Monday, May 1 from 7 to 8:30 pm.

If you are interested in attending this session, please reply to this email or call me at 555-555-5555. We encourage you to pass this email on to others and to bring interested family and friends to this meeting.



I look forward to seeing you on Monday, May 1.
If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely, Mary Smith, Parent of Two Springfield Elementary Students, William (K) and Kaitlyn (3rd),
marysmith@gmail.com



Sample Agenda

(For a meeting for like-minded parents and teachers)

- I. Welcome and introductions** *(if the group is small enough, nice to go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves, including, for parents, the schools and ages/grades of their kids and for teachers, their schools and ages/grades they teach)*
- II. Brief overview of the issues** *(and why you have brought them together today)*
- III. DEY Power Point**
- IV. Parents (Teachers) tell their stories: Specific examples of the impact of these policies on our young children** *Parents talk about their own children and teachers about their students. (Arrange for a few colleagues to start the conversation off with their own stories)*
- V. Brainstorming session – What can we do?**
 - A. Available alternatives** *(Have several suggestions available, such as a letter-writing campaign, letters to the editor, attend school board meetings, meet with superintendent, petition, opt out of testing, “play-in” at the school board)*
 - B. Make a plan.** *(Set priorities; what will we do first, second, third? What’s a long-term plan? Get volunteers to commit to specific jobs. Make sure that you have up-to-date contact info)*
- VI. Set the date for the next follow-up meeting**
- VII. Adjournment**





Sample Agenda for a Meeting with Decision-Makers *(who may not yet share your point of view)*

- I. **Welcome and introductions** *(if the group is small enough, it's nice to go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves)*
- II. **Brief overview of the issues** *(why have you invited them here today/ what specifically concerns you)*
- III. **DEY Power Point**
- IV. **Parents (and/or Teachers) tell their stories: Specific examples of the impact of these policies on our young children** *Parents talk about their own children and teachers about their students. (Arrange for a few colleagues to start the conversation off with their own stories)*
- V. **Discussion Session:** How can we provide appropriate early childhood education at our school, while adhering to mandates?
- VI. **Adjournment**





MEETING SIGN-IN

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Email</u>	<u>Additional Information</u>
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			



How to Write an Effective Letter to the Editor, Superintendent, Principal, or School Board

- State your point of view concisely and clearly in the first paragraph.
- Focus on one —or at the most, two—important points.
- Use verified facts from credible sources. Never overstate or exaggerate your case, as this can make everything else you’ve written suspect.
- State what you are FOR, not just what you oppose.
- Use personal stories—these can be very powerful.
- Do not make gross generalizations, using words like “everyone” and “all.”
- Do not attack specific groups or people, unless you can support your claims with facts or data. Never use insults or name-calling.
- Keep your letter short (one page, if possible), clear, and concise.
- Be sure to sign your name and to include your contact information.





Working to support and nurture the rights and needs of young children

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR ADVOCACY WORK





Apply for a Defending the Early Years Mini-Grant (from \$200-\$500)

Applications will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and up to 20 awards will be granted (depending on grant sizes).

Possible actions include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Hosting a parent information meeting
- ◆ Organizing a Call Your Legislator Day
- ◆ Spearheading a letter-writing campaign to politicians
- ◆ Organizing a “Play-In” at the local school board
- ◆ Publicizing an “Opt Out” campaign
- ◆ Hosting a viewing and conversation of chapter or two from the videos “A Year at Mission Hill;” or “When a Child Pretends” from the Sarah Lawrence Series
- ◆ Holding an Open Forum for community members and stakeholders
- ◆ Whatever else you may think of...

The application is available on the DEY website:
www.deyproject.org/early-childhood-activitist-toolkit/



This document will help teachers and parents understand why the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are inappropriate for Kindergarten - 3rd Grade, and will also help teachers and parents advocate against the CCSS - and for policies and classroom practices that will best meet the needs of young children.

SIX REASONS TO REJECT CCSS FOR GRADES K-3

1. Many of the Kindergarten - 3rd Grade CCSS are developmentally inappropriate, and are not based on well-researched child development knowledge about how young children learn. ^{1, 2}

The CCSS for young children were developed by mapping backwards from what is required at high school graduation to the early years. This has led to standards that:

- list discrete skills, facts and knowledge that do not match how young children develop, think or learn;
- require young children to learn facts and skills for which they are not ready;
- are often taught by teacher-led, didactic instruction instead of the experiential, play-based activities and learning young children need; ^{1, 2, 12}
- devalue the whole child and the importance of social-emotional development, play, art, music, science and physical development.

An example of a developmentally inappropriate Common Core standard for kindergarten is one that requires children to “read emergent reader texts with purpose and understanding.” Many young children are not developmentally ready to read in kindergarten and there is no research to support teaching reading in kindergarten. There is no research showing long-term advantages to reading at age five compared to reading at age six or seven.⁶

2. Many of the skills mandated by the CCSS erroneously assume that all children develop and learn skills at the same rate and in the same way.

Decades of child development research and theory from many disciplines (cognitive and developmental psychology, neuroscience, medicine and education) show how children progress at different rates and in different ways. For example, the average age that children start walking is 12 months. Some children begin walking as early as nine months and others not until 15 months - and all of this falls within a normal range. Early walkers are not better walkers than later walkers. A second example is that the average age at which children learn to read independently is 6.5 years. Some begin as early as four years and some not until age seven or later - and all of this falls within the normal range.⁵ Research has shown that children who score well on early intelligence tests have only a 40% correlation with later achievement tests results³ and that one-third of the brightest incoming third graders score below average prior to kindergarten.⁴

The CCSS are measured using frequent and inappropriate assessments – this includes high-stakes tests, standardized tests, and computer-administered assessments. States are required to use computer-based tests (such as PARCC) to assess CCSS. This is leading to mandated computer use at an early age and the misallocation of funds to purchase computers and networking systems in school districts that are already underfunded.

3. Early childhood educators did not participate in the development of the standards.

The CCSS do not comply with the internationally and nationally recognized protocol for writing professional standards. They were written without due process, transparency, or participation by knowledgeable parties. Two committees made up of 135 people wrote the standards - and not one of them was a K-3 classroom teacher or early childhood education professional. When the CCSS were first released, more than 500 early childhood professionals signed a Joint Statement opposing the standards on the grounds that they would lead to long hours of direct instruction; more standardized testing; and would crowd out highly important active, play-based learning. All of this has come to pass. Notably, this important Joint Statement was not even reported in the “summary of public feedback” posted on the Core Standards website.¹¹

4. There is a lack of research to support the current early childhood CCSS. The standards were not pilot tested and there is no provision for ongoing research or review of their impact on children and on early childhood education.

The CCSS do not build on what is known from earlier long-term studies such as the Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Project, the Abbott Schools of NJ, or Chicago Parent Child Centers which demonstrate what works for young children.^{7, 10} There is no convincing research showing that certain skills or bits of knowledge such as counting to 100 in kindergarten or being able to “tell and write time in hours and half-hours using analog and digital clocks in first grade” will lead to later success in school. There was no research on how to effectively train teachers on implementing the CCSS.

5. The standards do not take into account what young children today need when they get to school. Children need play in school now more than ever. They need teachers who are skilled facilitators of play so the solid foundations can be laid in the early school years for optimal learning in the later years.

Many of today’s children are over-exposed to electronics and screens.¹⁴ Many of them are overly scheduled and lack opportunities for sustained, unstructured, free play and especially outdoor/nature play.^{8, 9, 14}

These conditions have led to reduced play opportunities for many children, which has, in turn, led to deficiencies in many of the essential foundational skills that develop through play: executive functioning, self-control, persistence, creativity, problem-solving, flexibility, attention span, and ability to call on stored knowledge when needed.^{15, 16, 17}

6. The adoption of CCSS falsely implies that making children learn these standards will combat the impact of poverty on development and learning, and create equal educational opportunity for all children.

The U.S. is the wealthiest nation in the world and has the highest child poverty rate among industrialized nations.¹⁸ Corporate-style reformers would have us believe that we can solve the problem of poverty by mandating the teaching of basic skills in our nation’s schools. But schools cannot solve all of the problems created by societal factors that exist outside of school walls. While we do not have all the answers, years of research tell us that schools, while important, cannot solve all the disadvantages created by poverty.¹⁹ In fact, during the last decade of “education reform” - increased standards and testing, more accountability and data gathering - the inequalities in our education system have increased²⁴ and the child poverty rate has grown.²⁵



SIX PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE POLICY

1. Young children learn through active, direct experiences and play.²⁰

Young children learn best through active learning experiences within meaningful contexts. They need materials that can be used in multiple ways and allow for hands-on exploration and problem solving. They need dynamic, ongoing relationships with teachers who understand child development, can build onto and extend their hands-on activities, and provide well-thought out educational experiences that demonstrate knowledge of and respect for each child. The teachers must be able to create time in the schedule to promote these active experiences between children, as peer interactions play a crucial role in cognitive learning and social-emotional development.

2. Children learn skills and concepts at different times, rates, and paces. Every child is unique.^{5, 26}

Every child possesses a unique personality, temperament, family relationship and cultural background. Each has different interests, experiences and approaches to learning. Each child perceives and approaches the world differently, often taking different routes to reach the same ends. Thus, all children need learning experiences that take into account, support and build onto who they are as individuals.

3. Young children learn best when their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical selves become highly engaged in the learning process.

Active learning experiences and play engage multiple aspects of the child's capacities simultaneously. A curriculum focused on academic standards and goals compartmentalizes learning in ways that are not natural for young children. Hands-on, play-based, experiential learning engages the whole child and strengthens and supports young children's intellectual dispositions and their innate thirst for better, fuller, and deeper understanding of their own experiences.²⁷

4. Assessments of young children should be observational in nature, ongoing, and connected to curriculum and teaching. They should take into account the broad-based nature of young children's learning, not isolated skills, and the natural developmental variation in all areas of young children's growth and development.

Assessment methods should be developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.²¹

Assessments in early childhood should be as infrequent as possible to maintain high program quality. Standardized tests are highly unreliable for children younger than 3rd grade and should not be used in early childhood settings.^{10, 13, 28} The linking of test scores to teacher evaluation or to program evaluation leads to an increase in standards and test-based instruction, and less developmentally appropriate play-based, experiential education.

Administrators need to emphasize quality educational experiences and teaching, not test scores in the early years.¹⁰

5. The problems of inequality and child poverty need to be addressed directly.

Almost one quarter of our nation's children live in poverty.¹⁸ We need to do what other developed nations do which is to ensure that all of their children have health care, housing, and basic needs met for economic security and well being. Then we must fund our schools equitably, by giving more money to the schools and students where needs are greatest, which are most commonly schools in low-income neighborhoods. Educational funds should not be distributed to states based on their acceptance of specific education reforms, such as we have seen in the last decade. If we begin to redress some of the profound inequalities that exist for children in the U.S. today, this will be the surest way to genuinely improve schools and overall well-being and success for all of the nation's children.

6. Quality early childhood education with well-prepared teachers is the best investment a society can make in its future.

Research shows that early childhood education enhances the life prospects of children and has a high benefit-cost ratio and rate of return for society's investment. The Perry Preschool Project, a major longitudinal study of a quality preschool education program, showed that investment in high-quality preschool education improved the lives of those who were in the program and paid handsome returns to society. Building a strong foundation for learning in the early years is especially crucial for disadvantaged children.²²

The United States ranks twenty-fourth among wealthy nations in providing availability and quality of early childhood education.²³ Committing to high quality early childhood education with well-prepared teachers is a crucial first step our nation can take in reducing the achievement gaps between rich and poor children and improving the lives of children.

Defending the Early Years (DEY) is a non-profit project of the Survival Education Fund, Inc. - a 501(c) 3 educational organization. DEY would like to thank the Gesell Institute of Child Development for their assistance in creating this document.



Resources

- ¹ Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs: Serving children from birth through age 8*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- ² Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009). *Crisis in the kindergarten: Why children need to play in school*. College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood.
- ³ Bronson, P. & Merryman, A. (2009). *NatureShock*. New York City: 12 Book Press. (pp. 99-100.)
- ⁴ Bronson, P. & Merryman, A. (2009). (p. 101)
- ⁵ Gesell Institute of Child Development. (2012). *Gesell developmental observation-revised and Gesell early screener technical report ages 3-6*. New Haven, CT: Gesell Institute of Child Development. Retrieved September 17, 2013 from www.gesellinstitute.org.
- ⁶ Almon, J. (2013, Fall). Reading at five: Why? *SEEN Magazine*, 24-25.
- ⁷ Guddemi, M., & Zigler, E. (2011). *Children and schools: We know what to do, now let's do it!* [PDF]. Community Early Childhood LEADership E-Kit [CD-ROM]. New Haven, CT: Gesell Institute of Child Development.
- ⁸ Frost, J. (2010). *A history of play and play environments*. New York City: Routledge.
- ⁹ Brown, S. (2009). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. New York City: Avery.
- ¹⁰ Gesell Institute of Child Development (2011). Community Early Childhood LEADership E-Kit [CD-ROM]. New Haven, CT: Author.
- ¹¹ Miller, E and Carlsson-Paige, N. (January 29, 2013). *A tough critique of Common Core on early childhood education*. Washington Post. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/01/29/a-tough-critique-of-common-core-on-early-childhood-education/>
- ¹² Hirsch-Pasek, K. & Golinkoff, R. (2003). *Einstein never used flash cards*. New York City: Rodale.
- ¹³ Kim, J., & Suen, H. K. (2003). Predicting children's academic achievement from early assessment scores: A validity generalization study. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18(4), 547-566.
- ¹⁴ Levin, D. (2013). *Beyond remote controlled childhood*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- ¹⁵ Moffitt, T.E.; Arseneault, L.; Belsky, D.; Dickson, N.; Hancox, R.J.; Harrington, H.; Houts, R.; Poulton, R.; Roberts, B.W.; Ross, S.; Sears, M.R.; Thomson, W.M.; & Caspi, A. (2011). A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety. *Proceedings National Academy of Sciences*, 108(7), 2693-2698.
- ¹⁶ Leong, D. J., & Bodrova, E. (2012). Assessing and scaffolding: Make-believe play. *Young Children*, 67(1), 28-34.
- ¹⁷ Tough, P. (2012). *How children succeed: Grit, curiosity, and the hidden power of character*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- ¹⁸ UNICEF Office of Research (2013). 'Child Well-being in Rich Countries: A comparative overview', *Innocenti Report Card 11*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.
- ¹⁹ L. J. Schweinhart, J. Montie, Z. Xiang, W. S. Barnett, C. R. Belfield, & M. Nores. (2004). *Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40*. Michigan: HighScope Press.
- ²⁰ Singer, D., Golinkoff, R. & Hirsh – Pasek. (Eds.). (2006). *Play=learning: how play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- ²¹ NAEYC & NAECS/SDE. (2003). Early childhood curriculum and program evaluation. *Joint Position Statement*, 2.
- ²² Heckman, James. (2008). "Schools, Skills, and Synapses," NBER working paper 14064, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w14064.pdf>.
- ²³ Economist Intelligence Unit. (2012). Starting well. Benchmarking early education across the world. London: The Economist.
- ²⁴ Karp, S. (January 23, 2013). *The coming Common Core meltdown*. Washington Post. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/01/23/the-coming-common-core-meltdown/>
- ²⁵ Gabe, T. (2013). *Poverty in the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from <https://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/RL33069.pdf>
- ²⁶ Zigler, E., Singer, D., Bishop-Josef, S. (2004). *Children's play: The roots of reading*. Washington, DC.: Zero to Three Press.
- ²⁷ Katz, L. (2012). *Standards of Experience*. Retrieved from www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/2010/standards-of-experience
- ²⁸ Duncan, G.J. et al. (2007). School readiness and later achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(6), 1428-1446

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW:

SIX REASONS TO OPPOSE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR K-3RD GRADE

1) The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are developmentally inappropriate for young children.

The CCSS for young children were developed by mapping backwards from what is required at high school graduation to the early years. This has led to standards that fail to match how young children develop, think, or learn, and often require them to learn facts and skills before they are ready. As a result, the whole child is devalued along with the importance of social-emotional development, play, art, music, science and physical development.

2) Many of the skills mandated by the CCSS erroneously assume that all children develop and learn skills at the same rate and in the same way.

Children learn skills and concepts at different times, rates, and paces. The CCSS “One Size Fits All” curriculum fails to recognize that each child perceives and approaches the world differently, often taking different routes to reach the same ends. One size does not fit all in early education.

3) Early childhood educators did not participate in the development of the standards.

The CCSS do not comply with the internationally and nationally recognized protocol for writing professional standards. They were written without due process, transparency, or participation by knowledgeable parties and did not include a single K-3 classroom teacher or early childhood education professional.

4) There is a lack of research to support the current early childhood CCSS.

The CCSS do not build on well-known, long-term studies about early childhood development. Additionally, the standards were not pilot-tested and there is no provision for ongoing research or review of their impact on children and on early childhood education.

5) The standards do not take into account *how* young children learn.

Young children learn best when their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical selves become highly engaged in the learning process. Hands-on, play-based, experiential learning engages the whole child, whereas a curriculum focused on discrete academic standards and goals compartmentalizes learning in ways that are not natural for young children.

6) The idea that CCSS will combat the impact of poverty on development and learning and create equal educational opportunity for all children is overly simplistic.

Corporate-style reformers would have us believe that we can solve the problem of poverty by mandating the teaching of basic skills in our nation’s schools. But schools cannot solve all of the problems created by societal factors that exist outside of school walls. Inequality and child poverty need to be addressed directly by first ensuring all children have health care, housing, and basic needs met for economic security and well-being.

References available on Defending the Early Years website: <http://deyproject.org>



WHAT PARENTS CAN DO AT HOME



1. Provide young children with space and time to **play** at home and in the neighborhood.

2. **Read** good quality children's books and **limit screen time**.



3. Resist reinforcing the school's agenda – drilling for skills – and replace it with **opportunities for meaningful learning**.

4. If you see **signs of anxiety** related to testing, be reassuring and encouraging and talk to your child's teacher about ways to **reduce test-related stress**.



WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TOGETHER

Together parents can influence change-makers to support efforts to bring best practices back to the education of young children by:

1. Hosting informational meetings to rally parent support within the community.

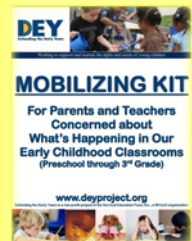
2. Organizing activities such as "Call Your Legislator Day," "Play-Ins," or "Opt-Out" campaigns during state testing.

3. Spearheading letter-writing campaigns to principals, superintendents or members of school boards.

4. Applying for a [DEY Mini Action Grant](http://deyproject.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/applicationdeyactionminigrant2.pdf) to support your efforts. The application is available at: <http://deyproject.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/applicationdeyactionminigrant2.pdf>



For more information on how to rally support in your community, download the **DEY Mobilizing Kit** here or at: <http://deyproject.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/dey-mobilizing-kit-final-final-5-3.pdf>



Defending the Early Years (DEY) is a non-profit project of the Survival Education Fund, Inc. - a 501(c) 3 educational organization.

<http://deyproject.org>

ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD

Tips for Parents: When Kindergarten Testing Is Out of Hand

Facts About Testing You Should Know

The No Child Left Behind law requires standardized tests in public schools starting in third grade. Pressure to raise scores has led many schools to begin testing in kindergarten. But tests given to children younger than 8 often produce misleading results. Young children can't sit and concentrate for long. They may not understand the questions or what is expected of them. And their performance is affected by anxiety, hunger, fatigue, and stress. Because of this, the odds that a test at the kindergarten level will give inaccurate results are about 50-50—the same odds as flipping a coin. (Reference: NAEYC)

Relying on standardized tests to make important decisions about a young child's education violates professional standards and National Academy of Sciences recommendations. Test scores should not determine whether children are placed in special education or gifted and talented programs. Focusing on tests also leads schools to pay less attention to things that are very important but hard to measure, like play skills, self-control, cooperation, physical development, creativity, and love of learning.

Many educators oppose testing of young children but don't speak out against it because they may be accused of being against rigor and "accountability." Academic pressure in kindergarten has not produced better results. On the contrary, experts believe it contributes to failure, retention, and behavior problems.

How You Can Help Your Child

- If you see signs of anxiety that may be related to testing, be reassuring and encouraging—and talk to the teacher about ways to reduce test-related stress.
- Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep and a good breakfast on testing day.
- Tell your child that tests do not measure how smart, able, or good a person is.
- Consider requesting that your kindergartner not be tested for the reasons given above.

What You Can Do to Change the System

- Talk to your child's teacher and principal about excessive testing. You may find they agree with you and will work with you to make changes.
- Talk to other parents about their experiences and observations. Work together to educate the community about the limitations and risks of testing young children.
- Ask the PTA or other parents' groups to organize a meeting on early childhood education and alternatives to standardized tests, such as observation and work-based assessments.
- Find out if there is a district policy on the testing of young children. Ask that policies be adopted in line with professional recommendations on testing children under age 8.
- Talk to your pediatrician about the importance of play for healthy child development and how stressful school experiences affect children. Ask him/her to get involved.
- Write a letter to the editor, or post a comment on the school web site or a parenting blog.
- Get support from early childhood specialists at a nearby university or from the state or local chapter of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

For more information, see *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School* at www.allianceforchildhood.org



**“Vision without action
is only dreaming,
action without vision
is only passing time,
but vision with
action can change
the world.”**

-Nelson Mandela