Governor Newsom Proposing to Expand Services for Babies and Toddlers
Holly A. Myers
Certified Insurance Counselor
Certified Risk Manager
Certified School Risk Manager

Holly began her insurance career at Uren, Harrison, and Kennedy in 1981. Holly went on to become an agency partner in 2005. The agency later changed their name to Uren & Myers Insurance Agency. Holly holds a Masters in Governance through the California School Board Association. She was elected to serve on the board of the John Swett Unified School District for two consecutive terms, one year of which was served as Board President.

Christopher E. Uren
Certified Insurance Counselor
Certified Risk Manager

Kit is a UC Berkeley graduate in Business Administration, Finance, and Economics. He has been a licensed insurance agent since 1978. In 1986, Kit became a partner at Uren, Harrison, and Kennedy and gained complete ownership of the company in 1998. Before joining Uren, Harrison, and Kennedy, Kit worked as a Marine Claims Surveyor and Underwriter for five years at Deans & Homer, a Managing General Agency in San Francisco. He is a past President of the Oakland Insurance Agents’ Association and past Board Member of the California Children’s Project through PACE.

Available Coverages

- Property
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- Workers’ Compensation
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- Employment Practices Liability
- Accident Medical
- Automobile
- Sexual Abuse
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- Cyber Liability
- Crime
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- Homeowners
- Earthquake
- Flood

Our Competitive Markets Include:

- Great American Insurance Group
- Everest National Insurance Company
- Travelers
- Berkshire Hathaway Companies
- Markel Insurance Company
- First Comp
- Employers
- The Hartford
- Deans & Homer
- Chubb Group
- Nonprofits’ Insurance Alliance of California
- Philadelphia Insurance Company
- State Compensation Insurance Fund

Every child requires special attention and has individual needs.
Child care insurance is no different. We understand your industry’s unique insurance needs.
You specialize in nurturing young minds, let Uren & Myers handle the insurance.
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Hello Members,

The elections are over and new year is upon us.

There is new leadership in the Capitol with Gavin Newsom as Governor. He has stated that he is for ECE and made a commitment to children’s issues.

Tony Thurmond, our Superintendent of public education will carry out policies set by the Department of Education.

How can California’s Early Care and Education community move forward and increase opportunities for all children and families?

Caring for, and educating young children has changed and progressed over the past few years. Policy makers need information to make informed policy decisions. We need to ensure that Universal Preschool is a mixed delivery system of public and private partnerships. Our programs are going to be affected by the changes so PACE needs to be part of the voice of change. It is up to us to advocate and make sure our voices are heard.

Let’s help make the change. Be inclusive. Be proactive.

PACE members have been working in this field for a long time. We know what families and children need and want, and we know what centers need to continue to serve our families.

All ECE programs need to be high-quality. Our programs need workforce stability, better salaries, and training for our teachers. There needs to be program standards and facilities appropriate for the ages served.

Join the conversation. What is your vision for our field? Your challenges?

If you would like to join one of our committees, we can always use the help and would love to hear your ideas. To make it convenient for all, many of the committee meetings are done via conference calls.

Have a special topic / workshop you would like to see at the conference? Please let us know!

Looking forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Up Coming Events:
April 26-28, 2019 - Redwood City for our Annual Conference.
2019: UPDATES, REMINDERS & ADVICE

Phillip M Cunningham
PACE Legal

2019 has been a busy year for child care operators. Many of you have requested my assistance in appealing citations or dealing with issues involving employees and or parents.

Also Licensing just published a listing of the most common deficiencies for all visit types in 2017. For infant center licensees it was personal rights (101223(a)(2)) and care and supervision (101429(a)(1)). For preschool licenses it was care and supervision (101229(a)(1)) and immunizations (H&S 1596.7995). For school-age licenses it was immunizations (H&S 1596.7995) and care and supervision (101229(a)(1)). It is interesting to note that CARE AND SUPERVISION citations ranked in the top two in each license category.

So, I want to caution all of you to be sure you are paying attention to the regulations and compliance. Remind your staff often about compliance issues. Of note, be sure your staff are aware of the ratio requirements and are adhering to them. Remind staff they cannot take shortcuts, no quick dash down the hall for supplies or a quick cell phone check or text message check. It will cost you dearly if you get a type A citation for lack of care and supervision.

I still cannot believe the number of calls I receive regarding breaks and meal periods. Remember, under no circumstances can employees waive their breaks and or meal periods, so they can leave early or come in late. It does not work that way, even if employees want it to.

Be sure you are checking your pay stubs and that they meet the legal requirements. Failure to include all 10 required items on the pay stubs of your non-exempt (hourly) employees can be very expensive. I have a case currently for a small employer who is looking at damages of well over six figures just because they left off the employee id number. Remember, you must include the following information on every pay stub: 1) the employer’s full legal name (not your DBA) but your registered operating name, the name you use at your bank and with licensing, which is not always the same as the name on your school sign, 2) the employer’s address, 3) the last four digits of the employee’s social security number or an employee id number, 4) all applicable hourly rates including straight time and overtime rates, 5) the beginning and ending date of the period for which the employee is being paid, 6) all deductions from the employee’s pay, 7) the amount of gross wages earned, 8) the net amount of wages being paid, 9) the total number of hours worked at straight time and the total number of hours worked at overtime, and 10) the name of the employee. If you fail to provide all this information you could be liable for damages and for penalties and attorney fees. Be sure you periodically check your pay stubs for completeness and compliance.

Also, how many of you list your facility license number or numbers on your advertising, including your websites and your vehicles. It is required under the regulations you know (see 101162) so be sure you are complying. I have seen citations issued for this deficiency. Also, some of you have begun moving away from paper records to electronic storage of both children’s records and employee’s records. This is allowable under licensing regulations and laws; however, you are still required to be able to immediately produce a paper copy of the records upon request by a representative from licensing. In addition, Licensing states that for BEST PRACTICES you should have in place a written plan on how the records will be backed up and on how they would be made available in the event of a power failure or other disaster. So, it is critical that if you are going to electronic record keeping you better also have a back-up power generator or immediately available alternate source for producing these records. If licensing shows up and requests records and you say you are unable to comply because your power is out, then you may be cited. There is a new Provider Information Notice available on the DSS website; please check out PIN 18-03.1-CCP.

Also, now might be a good time to update your Disaster and Mass Casualty Plans. Check out PIN 18-02-CCP. With all the flooding, wildfires and other weather-related disasters occurring you never know when your facility might be affected. Also, the upsurge in measles outbreaks as well as the flu could affect your facility.

Infant supervision remains a high priority with licensing. In their view to visually supervise and observe sleeping infants there should be no obstruction to the view of the infants. In licensing’s view an obstruction may include transparency walls (windows) and half or pony walls. This is subject to
interpretation but remember if licensing determines that the transparency wall or half wall impairs staff’s ability to provide constant and direct supervision the facility will be cited.

There has been new legislation passed which will require every licensed child care facility which is located in a building constructed before January 01, 2010 to have its drinking water tested for lead contamination levels on a specified schedule and to notify parents and legal guardians of children enrolled at the facility of the requirements to conduct the test as well as the results of the test. If the test results indicated elevated levels of lead the facility must immediately make inoperable and cease using the affected fountains and faucets and obtain a potable water source for staff and children. This law takes effect on January 01, 2020 and requires the testing to be done on or after January 01, 2020 but no later than January 01, 2023 and then every 5 years thereafter. I suggest you start planning now. If you rent or lease your building you may want to review your agreement with your landlord to see who is responsible for the testing and or repairs if necessary. Your rental or lease document may control that issue.

Finally, I receive many calls regarding the methodology for disenrolling a child from your program, particularly for behavior issues. For title 22 facilities this is generally controlled by the terms and conditions of your Admissions Agreement, which by regulation, is supposed to state the conditions under which it may be terminated and by the regulations which allow you to assess whether or not you can meet the child’s needs. For Title 5 programs the rules are more complicated. Under 5CCR 18119-18122 there are specific due process requirements which must be met before a child may be disenrolled. Typically, these requirements specify steps which must be taken to document the child’s problems and the facility’s efforts to deal with them. The process will take about 6 months of work to complete. I am raising this because I believe these due process steps will sooner or later apply to title 22 programs as well. So, you should all begin developing guidelines for identifying, documenting and dealing with children’s behavioral problems which may lead to disenrollment. This will also require you to document the efforts you have made to work with the child’s parents or legal guardians to deal with the identified issues. You might want to review CDE Management Bulletin 18-06 for some guidance in this area.

In closing I hope 2019 is off to a good start for all of you, have a great year.
GOVERNOR NEWSOM PROPOSING TO EXPAND SERVICES FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS

By Zaidee Stavely
EdSource

Gov. Gavin Newsom is expected to announce plans to spend big on babies and toddlers, significantly expanding a range of programs, from helping parents care for their small children at home to identifying developmental delays early.

In his first budget proposal, which is due to the Legislature by Thursday, Newsom plans to propose $100 million to expand a home-visiting program — in which nurses and social workers visit young, low-income parents to give health and parenting advice — and another $100 million for developmental screenings, according to a document provided by a source close to the Newsom transition team. Those screenings consist of surveys that pediatricians and other health care providers use to ask parents and guardians if their babies and toddlers are meeting milestones, such as crawling, picking up small objects, or speaking their first words.

The document also says Newsom plans to allocate $247 million to expand child care facilities on college campuses for student parents and $500 million for upgrading or establishing child care facilities and providing professional development for child care providers.

According to an article published in the New York Times, Newsom is also proposing to radically expand paid family leave for parents of newborns from six weeks to six months, though he has not yet identified funding for it.

The plans offer a glimpse of how Newsom plans to focus on children from birth to age 3, a promise he made during his campaign, in addition to expanding preschool for 4-year-olds. "We need to emphasize prenatal care and the first three years of a child’s life when nearly 85 percent of brain development occurs," Newsom wrote in 2017.

That theme was underscored during the governor’s inauguration Monday, when Newsom’s 2-year-old son, Dutch, toddled around on stage with a pacifier and a baby blanket and the new governor proclaimed, “All kids, not just the children of a governor and a filmmaker, should have a good life in California.”

Newsom’s plan for home visits would dramatically expand the program’s funding, which received state funds for the first-time last year — about $27 million for 2018-19 and $52 million set aside for each of the following two years.

As part of the program, nurses and social workers regularly visit low-income parents and their babies, from pregnancy to age 2, to give them one-on-one advice and answer questions about their children’s development, health and learning. Home-visiting programs such as the Nurse-Family Partnership have been shown to have long-term benefits for children’s reading and math skills, in addition to improving their health and mental health, and to help mothers get high school diplomas or GEDs and better jobs. Children Now, a nonprofit organization that advocates for children, estimates that fewer than 3 percent of California families receive home visits.

“It’s definitely a big deal,” said Ted Lempert, president of Children Now. “We are thrilled that the state finally invested in home visiting last year, but we were still catching up to other states. What’s really exciting is the
governor is prioritizing this and showing real leadership, taking California a lot further.”

Early childhood advocates are also applauding the funding proposed for developmental screenings. The screenings are a helpful tool to diagnose developmental, behavioral or social delays early and get children the interventions needed as soon as possible. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children receive these screenings at least three times before they turn 3 years old, but only a fifth of California children receive them, one of the lowest rates in the country, according to the Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health. Families of color are particularly affected, as doctors and other health providers are less likely to ask them about their children’s development than white families, according to researchers with the American Academy of Pediatrics. Legislators attempted to pass a bill to provide more developmental screenings last year, but it was vetoed by Gov. Jerry Brown.

Newsom plans to phase in preschool for all low-income 4-year-olds over three years. He has not mentioned any funding for additional subsidized child care slots for children 3 and younger, instead focusing on the $500 million for child care facilities and workers. Early childhood advocates have said spending in both these areas is necessary to expand the number of spaces available for low-income children, in addition to adding subsidies. Currently, only 14 percent of children under 2 and 38 percent of 3-year-olds who are eligible for subsidized child care in California are actually enrolled, according to the Learning Policy Institute, a research and policy organization based in Palo Alto.

Mary Ignatius, statewide organizer of Parent Voices, a parent-led organization that advocates for affordable child care, applauded the governor’s plans, but said she looks forward to working with Newsom and the Legislature to increase the number of vouchers and expand subsidized child care for low-income families with babies and toddlers, since there aren’t enough slots for hundreds of thousands of California children who are eligible for free or low-cost child care.

“Families need affordable child care,” Ignatius said. “They cannot walk out the door without affordable child care to go to an interview, to go to a job every day, or to pursue higher education. If we’re really being serious about better outcomes for children, we really have to understand what their parents’ needs are.”

This article was originally published by EdSource at www.edsource.org.

Together, we’ll write the next chapter.

For over 50 years Pacific Oaks College® has been training the next generation of early educators, and we continue to build and expand upon this tradition.

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- **B.A. or M.A. ECE Trauma specialization**, providing the knowledge, tools, and techniques to support children in need.
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School expulsion and suspension is one of the most direct pipelines to prison. Even more, interestingly, is the troubling (or sobering) truth that suspension and expulsion rates happen before children even arrive on their first day of kindergarten. The current evidence reveals that preschoolers have the highest suspension and expulsion rate than middle schoolers or high schoolers. And, although the research literature is rich in recommendations to divert and intercept the cradle to prison pipeline, these recommendations are often laced with loose protocols or poorly defined solutions that end up undermining the intent to mitigate or stop the rising tide of children entering the juvenile justice system. A key solution to this issue is helping teachers understand how the science of child and adolescent development is a compelling lens to understanding and responding to student behavior, classroom engagement, creating a sense of belongingness, opportunities for more in-depth learning and fostering a love for learning, low teacher morale as well as offering coping mechanisms and pathways to resiliency. A significant message within this keynote is that we have to face the issue of the school to prison pipeline squarely and without excuses. This keynote introduces a powerful paradigm shift (and solution) to how we have historically thought about and approached juvenile delinquency and school reform, in the K-12 system, with an emphasis on the role and power of early care and education.
Networking Break with Exhibitors

Being Playful with Math: Discovering New Ways to Think About Numbers
We all know that rote-counting and 1-to-1 correspondence are part of math, but we often underestimate what children can do, as well as how fun math can be. Discover new ways to underhand math concepts to apply in your classrooms.

Speaker | Alexandra Dutton, Old Firehouse School

Combined 100 Ways to Promote Social-Emotional Learning PLUS Social-Emotional Learning for School Readiness
Participiants will learn about the 100 ways with which they can promote learning and good behavior with their young children. Simple ways to dramatically change your classroom environment for the better. Social-emotional skills are the key to academic success. Participants will learn songs, games and stories that enhance academics and school readiness through social-emotional learning.

Speaker | Dr. Michael Hubler, EC-Learn

Marketing in Today’s World - How Do I Market to this New Age Group of Parents?
Long gone are the days of advertising your school in the yellow pages. Today’s parents require school owners to be more creative in their marketing outreach with social media, innovative ideas with parent ambassadors, and so much more.

Speaker | Kathe Petchel, Hinge

Status Update on the CDE Child Development Staff Retention Program (AB 212)
Intended Audience: CSPP Preschool Teachers. Since 2000 the Child Development Staff Retention Program (AB 212) has been a resource for child development staff that work directly with children in CDE EESD-contracted centers and Family Child Care Education Home Network programs. The program provides stipends for Early Childhood Education (ECE) staff that complete the local county program requirements. AB212 programs encourage ECE staff to complete their educational and professional growth goals, maintain their child development permits and become members of a larger professional learning community of ECE educators. County AB 212 program highlights and the latest AB 212 Evaluation Report will be reviewed.

Speaker | Elizabeth Golchert and Andrea Cruthird, CA Department of Education

Lunch with Exhibitors

It’s a Zoo in Here! Principles of Classroom Management
Focus is on making an academic but pragmatic distinction between effective management (interventions that prevent from problems arising) and discipline (interventions that address problem solving). By recognizing the underlying emotional and psychological issues that arise in children & adults prior to and in discipline situations, adults can use effective techniques to properly manage potential discipline situations and crises before they erupt and/or as they erupt. Participants will learn how to make accurate diagnoses of themselves as the discipliner, of the child, and of the discipline situation so that they may be able to effectively apply the management/discipline techniques discussed.

Speaker | Ronald Mah

Supporting Your Play Based Program by Making Learning Visible
Understand current research around the importance of play based learning. Gain Skills on how to communicate child-directed learning, by making it visible to children, families, and visitors, using displays and documentation.

Speaker | Kim Adams, Barron Park Preschool
Update on the Early Learning and Support Division, Quality Improvement Professional Development System and Projects

This workshop will provide information on the status of several quality initiative projects, including the addition of adult learning and coaching competencies, the leveraging of the CDE EESD professional development systems in Quality Counts California, and new California Early Childhood Online modules. Discussion will include the status of projects and future plans for project implementation.

Speaker Cecelia Fisher-Dahms, CA Department of Education

STEM: Increase Quality and Enrollment

Find out how to implement the highest quality STEM and increase your enrollment with this fun and hands-on workshop. See for yourself why schools across California and all of China are using our curriculum.

Speaker Tamar Andrews, Temple Isaiah Preschool

"Your Parents Enrollment Journey: How Families Find You & Decide to Enroll"

86% of millennials will pay more for a better customer experience. Experiences that start online with information, reviews, process, and then your relevant and continued contact throughout. Let's map the journey. Includes tools to do your own.

Speaker Maria Bereket, Design Bear Marketing

The Integrated Nature of Learning

This workshop will provide information on the Integrated Nature of Learning publication from the new CDE online series Best Practices for Planning Curriculum for Young Children. This publication examines how play, learning, and curriculum work together in early education. It describes the relationship context for early learning and the role of the teacher in supporting children’s active engagement in learning. Participants will explore how learning experiences in one domain may also foster learning in other domains, and how an integrated approach results in high-quality early learning experiences that contribute to well-being and successful development of all children.

Comments: Perfect for early childhood teachers, family child care home providers, administrators, home visitors, and college faculty.

Speaker WestEd

The Approaching Tsunami - How to Balance Rising Staff Costs with Tuition Rates

With an average of 55% of all childcare revenue being spent on staff and staff-related costs, it is imperative to spend wisely within your school, especially with staff costs creeping up! Join us as we share how to make that balance work!

Speaker Mike Pepper, Hinge and Kathe Petchel, Hinge

Boogers, Tantrums, Head Lice, and Pin Worms…Just Why Do We Do This?

A humorous lecture that encourages participants to value both the challenges of working with (or having) young children and themselves as vital contributors to children and the community. From runny noses, to germs to tantrums -- the frustrations of early childhood development work (and raising children) are balanced against the impact of good and great caregiving on children’s development and community and social health.

Speaker Ronald Mah

Preschool Resources from EESD Early Learning and Development System

This workshop presents a review of preschool resources developed by the Early Education and Support Division of the California Department of Education, with a special focus on Preschool Learning Foundations, Preschool Curriculum Framework, and the Preschool Program Guidelines. Includes updates on upcoming preschool publications, online modules and DVDs.

Speaker WestEd

Reception, Silent Auction & Raffle with Exhibitors
SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2019

7:00am - 11:00am  Preschool Tours
9:00am - 10:00am  Conference Registration
9:00am - 9:30am  Continental Breakfast
9:00am - 12:00pm  Exhibits Open
9:45am - 10:45am  Enhancing Dual-Language Learning with Sign Language
Participants will learn how the visual learning of sign language enhances concept understanding, communication, language, pre-literacy skills, and literacy for dual-language learners. Participants will learn how to boost dual language learners skills through matching games, songs, stories and play.
Speaker  Lillian Hubler, Time to Sign

11:00am - 12:00pm

Closing General Session - What’s on the Horizon for Early Childhood Education and Community Based Organizations in 2019
With the world of education constantly adapting to the changing times, it can be difficult to keep up with the changes and trends that make ECE so effective. Engage in an interactive session with industry experts about trends, changes, and new state regulations impacting the child care industry. Learn how you can prepare yourself for the future of ECE and support the advancement of high-quality services to children and their families. Q & A to follow.
Speakers  Nina Buthee and Valerie Denero, EveryChild California

Additional sessions to be add soon. Subject to change without notice.
# PACE 2019 Conference Registration Form

**April 26-28, 2019 | Pullman Hotel San Francisco Bay**

Save time - Register online at www.pacenet.org

Questions? 800 924-2460

Or submit this form via fax, email or mail

FAX 916 444 7462 | info@pacenet.org

PACE 1 Capitol Mall Suite 800, Sacramento CA 95814

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*Group member is for groups of 5 or more

If you are interested in Student Pricing, please contact the PACE office.

**After April 1, 2019 please add $30 to your registration fees**

- [ ] Check or  
- [ ] Visa  
- [ ] M/C  
- [ ] AMEX

**Card# ____________________________ Exp. Date ____________________________ Security Code ____________________________

**Name as it appears on card ____________________________

**Billing address for card ____________________________

**City ___________ State ___________ Zip ___________

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**Any Dietary Needs?: ____________________________

**Total Due: ____________________________

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**Registering as part of the Group member package?**

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**CREDIT CARD**  I authorize PACE to charge the following credit card, in the full amount due. I understand that if I cancel prior to April 1, 2019, I may receive a full refund minus a $100 processing fee. Any cancellations after April 1, 2019 will not be refunded.

**Signature ____________________________

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Please send in form via email to ewise@amgroup.us, or by fax to 916-444-7462.

**Online registration is also available at http://www.paceca.org**
HOW ‘TWISTED’ EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION HAS BECOME
— FROM A CHILD DEVELOPMENT EXPERT

By Valerie Strauss
Washington Post

Nancy Carlsson-Paige is an early childhood development expert who has been at the forefront of the debate on how best to educate — and not educate — the youngest students. She is a professor emerita of education at Lesley University in Cambridge, Ma., where she taught teachers for more than 30 years and was a founder of the university’s Center for Peaceable Schools. She is also a founding member of a nonprofit called Defending the Early Years, which commissions research about early childhood education and advocates for sane policies for young children.

Carlsson-Paige is author of “Taking Back Childhood.” The mother of two artist sons, Matt and Kyle Damon, she is also the recipient of numerous awards, including the Legacy Award from the Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corps for work over several decades on behalf of children and families. She was just given the Deborah Meier award by the nonprofit National Center for Fair and Open Testing.

In her speech accepting the award (named after the renowned educator Deborah Meier), Carlsson-Paige describes what has happened in the world of early childhood education in the current era of high-stakes testing, saying, “Never in my wildest dreams could I have foreseen the situation we find ourselves in today.” Here’s the speech, which I am publishing with permission:

Thank you FairTest for this Deborah Meier Hero in Education Award. FairTest does such great advocacy and education around fair and just testing practices. This award carries the name of one of my heroes in education, Deborah Meier—she’s a force for justice and democracy in education. I hope that every time this award is given, it will allow us to once again pay tribute to Deb. Also, I feel privileged to be accepting this honor alongside Lani Guinier.

When I was invited to be here tonight, I thought about the many people who work for justice and equity in education who could also be standing here. So I am thinking of all of them now and I accept this award on their behalf — all the educators dedicated to children and what’s fair and best for them.

It’s wonderful to see all of you here — so many family and friends, comrades in this struggle to reclaim excellent public education for all – not just some – of our children.

I have loved my life’s work – teaching teachers about how young children think, how they learn, how they develop socially, emotionally, morally. I’ve been fascinated with the theories and science of my field and seeing it expressed in the actions and the play of children.

So never in my wildest dreams could I have foreseen the situation we find ourselves in today.
Where education policies that do not reflect what we know about how young children learn could be mandated and followed. We have decades of research in child development and neuroscience that tell us that young children learn actively — they have to move, use their senses, get their hands-on things, interact with other kids and teachers, create, invent. But in this twisted time, young children starting public pre-K at the age of 4 are expected to learn through “rigorous instruction.”

And never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that we would have to defend children’s right to play.

Play is the primary engine of human growth; it’s universal — as much as walking and talking. Play is the way children build ideas and how they make sense of their experience and feel safe. Just look at all the math concepts at work in the intricate buildings of kindergartners. Or watch a 4-year-old put on a cape and pretend to be a superhero after witnessing some scary event.

But play is disappearing from classrooms. Even though we know play is learning for young kids, we are seeing it shoved aside to make room for academic instruction and “rigor.”

I could not have foreseen in my wildest dreams that we would have to fight for classrooms for young kids that are developmentally appropriate. Instead of active, hands-on learning, children now sit in chairs for far too much time getting drilled on letters and numbers. Stress levels are up among young kids. Parents and teachers tell me: children worry that they don’t know the right answers; they have nightmares, they pull out their eyelashes, they cry because they don’t want to go to school. Some people call this child abuse and I can’t disagree.

I could not have foreseen in my wildest dreams that we would be up against pressure to test and assess young kids throughout the year often in great excess — often administering multiple tests to children in kindergarten and even pre-K. Now, when young children start school, they often spend their first days not getting to know their classroom and making friends. They spend their first days getting tested. Here are words from one mother as this school year began:

“My daughter’s first day of kindergarten — her very first introduction to elementary school — consisted almost entirely of assessment. She was due at school at 9:30, and I picked her up at 11:45. In between, she was assessed by five different teachers, each a stranger, asking her to perform some task.

“By the time I picked her up, she did not want to talk about what she had done in school, but she did say that she did not want to go back. She did not know the teachers’ names. She did not make any friends. Later that afternoon, as she played with her animals in her room, I overheard her drilling them on their numbers and letters.”

The most important competencies in young children can’t be tested — we all know this. Naming letters and numbers is superficial and almost irrelevant in relation to the capacities we want to help children develop: self-regulation, problem-solving ability, social and emotional competence, imagination, initiative, curiosity, original thinking — these capacities make or break success in school and life and they can’t be reduced to numbers.

Yet these days, all the money and resources, the time dedicated to professional development, they go to tooling teachers up to use the required assessments. Somehow the data gleaned from these tests is supposed to be more valid than a teacher’s own ability to observe children and understand their skills in the context of their whole development in the classroom.

The first time I saw for myself what was becoming of many of the nation’s early childhood classrooms was when I visited a program in a low-income community in north Miami. Most of the children were on free- and reduced-price lunch.

There were 10 classrooms – kindergarten and pre-K. The program’s funding depended on test scores, so — no surprise — teachers taught to the test. Kids who got low scores, I was told, got extra drills in reading and math and didn’t get to go to art. They used a computer program to teach 4- and 5-year-olds how to “bubble.” One teacher complained to me that some children go outside the lines.

In one of the kindergartens I visited, the walls were barren and so was the whole room. The teacher was testing one little boy at a computer at the side of the room. There was no classroom aide. The other children were sitting at tables copying words from the chalk board. The words were: “No talking. Sit in your seat. Hands to Yourself.”

The teacher kept shouting at them from her testing corner: Be quiet! No talking!

Most of the children looked scared or disengaged, and one little boy was sitting alone. He was quietly crying. I will never forget how these children looked or how it felt to watch them, I would say, suffering in this context that was such a profound mismatch with their needs.

It’s in low-income, under-resourced communities like this one where children are most subjected to heavy doses of teacher-led drills and tests. Not like in wealth-
ier suburbs where kids have the opportunity to go to early childhood programs that have play, the arts, and project-based learning. It’s poverty — the elephant in the room — that is the root cause of this disparity.

A few months ago, I was alarmed to read a report from the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights showing that more than 8,000 children from public preschools across the country were suspended at least once in a school year, many more than once. First of all, who suspends a preschooler? Why and for what? The very concept is bizarre and awful. But 8,000? And then to keep reading the report to see that a disproportionate number of those suspended preschoolers were low income, black boys.

There is a connection, I know, between these suspensions and ed reform policies: Children in low-income communities are enduring play deficient classrooms where they get heavy doses of direct teaching and testing. They have to sit still, be quiet in their seats and comply. Many young children can’t do this and none should have to.

I came home from that visit to the classrooms in North Miami in despair. But fortunately, the despair turned quickly to organizing. With other educators we started our nonprofit Defending the Early Years. We have terrific early childhood leaders with us (some are here tonight: Deb Meier, Geralyn McLaughlin, Diane Levin and Ayla Gavins). We speak in a unified voice for young children.

We publish reports, write op eds, make videos and send them out on YouTube, we speak and do interviews every chance we get.

We’ve done it all on a shoestring. It’s almost comical: The Gates Foundation has spent more than $200 million just to promote the Common Core. Our budget at Defending the Early Years is .006 percent of that.

We collaborate with other organizations. FairTest has been so helpful to us. And we also collaborate with — Network for Public Education, United Opt Out, many parent groups, Citizens for Public Schools, Badass Teachers, Busted Pencils Radio, Save Our Schools, Alliance for Childhood and ECE PolicyWorks — There’s a powerful network out there — of educators, parents and students — and we see the difference we are making.

We all share a common vision: Education is a human right and every child deserves one. An excellent, free education where learning is meaningful — with arts, play, engaging projects, and the chance to learn citizenship skills so that children can one day participate — actively and consciously — in this increasingly fragile democracy.

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