



Key Takeaways from **Reimagining Early Care and Education: A New American Vision**

On March 30, 2021 New America hosted an event that examined why reimagining and investing in early care and education (ECE) must be a national priority and how to make high-quality ECE a reality for all children. With federal leadership and \$39 billion in new funding headed to the child care industry thanks to the American Rescue Plan, now is the time for a bold, post-pandemic agenda for a strong ECE system that prioritizes equity, embraces whole child approaches, and connects smoothly with elementary education and systems that support family well-being. At New America's event, speakers and panelists shared their visions for a better system and innovative approaches for achieving it. Here are their primary themes:

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"We have a bold opportunity here not just to throw money at a problem but to build lasting architecture for equitable early education and affordable child care."



Congresswoman
Rosa DeLauro
(D-CT)

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Educators are the backbone of our ECE system. This essential workforce is underpaid and undervalued. Educators must be prepared, supported, and compensated fairly to best support children's learning and development.

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“We have to start looking at the adults in the equation in a much more intentional way, in a much more supportive way. So tending to the whole child means tending to the adults in their lives and that means their parents, but also their caregivers and educators from the very beginning... We need to move beyond a concept of compensated; we want our workforce to be *compensatiated*. And what I mean by that is: I want them to have satisfaction, not only in knowing that they have a paycheck that they can support their own families on and that recognizes the complex work that they do to support child development, but also the benefits, health, 401k, all of the things that keep us whole as people.”



Brandy Jones Lawrence,
Senior Director, Birth-to-Three Policy,
Communication & Partnerships at Bank Street College of Education

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“I think an immediate goal of reframing our vision of early education is a system that places children, families, and educators on equal footing... We are often talking about a system for children and families, only thinking about the adults who are working with those children as actors in the system that are there really only in the service of children, rather than [thinking about] what they need as participants in their own right. And I think explicitly naming that we need a system in which educators thrive as well helps us to elevate the policy needs and resource needs to talk about the workforce... When we don't do that, we can have this real deficit perspective of the workforce. This gets reflected too often in policy proposals and quality improvement initiatives where there's an emphasis on input into fixing, monitoring teachers and caregivers, and what behaviors and practices they are employing, before we're even thinking about what inputs they need as people in their own right, to provide the conditions that give them good and fair pay, benefits, and those working supports that allow them to thrive.”

Lea J. E. Austin,

Director, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment,
University of California, Berkeley



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Policies and practices must center around equity. This means acknowledging the disenfranchisement and discrimination faced by children, families, and teachers, and creating learning systems that eradicate barriers to success, empower children and families, and inspire a more just society.

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“We know that our early childhood workforce is disproportionately made up of women, 40 percent [of which are] folks of color. And so if we want to address racial equity as a society we have to address equitable compensation and support for our workforce.”



John B. King Jr.,

former U.S. Secretary of Education and
former President & CEO, Education Trust

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“The equity piece has to be the center and has to be driving it because we don’t have a choice. We have the moral obligation to make up for systemic racism and all the damages, accrued over time on people of color. But we have to decide if we’re going to continue to center whiteness, from which all of our systems are born, or if we’re going to repair those damages and move forward with equity at the center... More than half of our young kids now are kids of color, and so if the system is not working for our kids, it’s not working, period.”



Shantel Meek, Founding Director,
Children’s Equity Project, Arizona State University

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A P–20 approach that supports the seamless development of all learners, prenatal through adulthood, and breaks down silos between ECE and K–12 is essential. It takes the “whole child” into account and connects with other systems that strengthen family well-being.

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“The community [in the San Antonio Promise Zone] learned that, by linking complex systems in a holistic way, they could get results for children. They stopped thinking in silos and they started thinking first about kids and what they need.”

Cecilia Muñoz,
Senior Advisor, New America and
former Director of Intergovernmental Affairs
and Director of the Domestic Policy Council



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We've set up some of these silos. We know that families don't live in funding streams, but many of our decisions have been based on those funding streams.”

Amy O'Leary, Director of Early Education for All, Strategies for Children



“You want to talk about breaking down silos: children are not born at four and suddenly they walk through the school door as though they are new and fresh.”

Danielle Ewen, Principal, EducationCounsel



“We need to stop referring to our systems as K–12 systems. Truly they are P–20 systems. We're talking prenatal through age 20.”

Edward Manuszak, Superintendent, Dundee Community Schools, Michigan and co-chair of AASA Early Learning Cohort



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“I think that the values that underlie who we are as a nation are so highly individualistic that we seek singular solutions to problems... Our public policy is really built on single stream solutions and funding and there are no incentives to work collaboratively.”

Meera Mani, Director of Children, Families, and Communities, David and Lucile Packard Foundation



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Early care and education is infrastructure, a public and social good, and a critical foundation for our economy.

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“When we think infrastructure in this country, we need to think care just as much as construction.”

Anne-Marie Slaughter,
CEO, New America,
and former Director of
Policy and Planning,
U.S. Department of State



“As we think about strengthening our social infrastructure, we’ve got to think about: how do we ensure that families have access to paid family leave; how do we ensure that they have access to affordable high-quality child care, zero to four; and how do we ensure that that care is affordable, particularly for high-needs communities that too often don’t have access to care.”

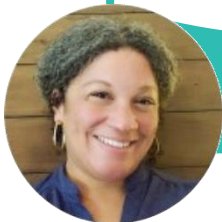
John B. King Jr.,
former U.S. Secretary of Education and
former President & CEO, Education Trust



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“As long as we have this market-based system where parent fees and parent pay is directly connected to educator earnings and resources going into programs, we're not going to be able to adequately address the dreadful conditions that we see... We can't ask parents to pay more, so we really have to think about a public solution that ultimately is the driver of this. We are trying to deliver something that is a public good on a private market.”

Lea J. E. Austin,
Director, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment,
University of California, Berkeley



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"We must invest in social infrastructure, not just building roads and bridges but also investing in the early care that enables families to work and children to thrive. Child care is a public good— a collective responsibility and a matter of gender and racial justice."



Congresswoman **Jackie Speier**,
D-CA

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“We have to start by reframing the whole system. We have a child care system that is built on the basis of being welfare... As a subsidy-based system, you have to basically prove your worthiness... Contrast that with something that is a right, something that is more of a social good... In all 50 state constitutions, a child in this country has a right to public education. When I went to enroll my daughter in kindergarten, I had to show up with a birth certificate and proof of address. That was it. It took me 20 minutes and she was set for the next 13 years.”

Elliot Haspel, Program Officer, Education Policy and Research,
Robins Foundation



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Families and educators must be included in policy setting conversations.

This means going beyond typical listening tours, surveys, comment periods, and other activities to gather feedback from interested parties. These activities often take place too far along in or after the decision making process. Instead, decision makers should engage family and educators early and often in shaping policy.

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“We have really endeavored, in the community I am currently serving in, to not allow the way funding streams are structured to influence the way our community approaches providing early care and education... We used a collective impact framework that forced us to put children and families in the center of the work we do.”



Tammy Mann, President & CEO,
Campagna Center

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“In the end, this is our aspirational place—making sure that we give people the space, in the systems as they exist at the city and federal government [level], to really see the families. And that does mean breaking out of some real strong, existing, beloved funding flows and checkboxes. But at the end, the test is: is it really working for families and can we elevate that to the highest level of the systems that are serving kids?”

Tara Dawson McGuiness,
Fellow and Senior Adviser, New Practice Lab, New America



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“Having early educators sharing in the responsibility of shaping policy, shaping our advocacy platforms, as key actors in the system who are working most intimately with children and families on a daily basis and who can really bring those direct experiences to the table—it’s so absent in so many ways across our early care and education system. Those voices really have to be central to informing advocacy and policy.”



Lea J. E. Austin,

Director, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment,
University of California, Berkeley

Related Resources

New America, [Supporting Early Learning in America: Policies for a New Decade](#)

New America, [Reimagining Early Care and Education: A New American Vision](#)

New America, [Equity in Early Childhood Education](#)

New America, [Transforming the Early Education Workforce: A Multimedia Guidebook](#)