

About Us

About Us

Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) is the trusted, independent voice putting children's needs first for more than 30 years.

A cornerstone of ACNJ's success is our independence. We are non-partisan and accept no state funding for advocacy, giving us the freedom to speak up for children who have no voice and no vote.

Our work results in better laws and policies, more effective funding and stronger services for children and families. This means more children are given the chance to grow up safe, healthy and educated.

Our Agenda

Getting It Right From the Start

All young children need high-quality early education. It supports their healthy growth and development, putting them on a path to school success. It is a foundation for early literacy, so that they are reading on grade level by the end of third grade, a key to future school success and high school graduation.

Supporting Family Success

The healthy growth and development of children starts with their parents. All parents must be able to provide stability and security for their children.

Protecting Vulnerable Children and Youth

Children in the care of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems need special protections. Separated from their parents and communities, they depend on government services for their health, safety and well-being. These systems must be held accountable to make sure that children's needs are met while in state care and that they return to safe and stable families or to other permanent homes.



35 Halsey Street
Newark, NJ 07102
www.acnj.org

Results



Additional state dollars to support high-quality preschool for children in New Jersey's most disadvantaged communities. ACNJ's budget advocacy helped shore up support for this critical early education.



Additional New Jersey students who are eating healthy morning meals at school as a result of the NJ Food for Thought Campaign, co-led by ACNJ.



\$500,000

Foundation dollars committed to improve the well-being of Newark's children in response to ACNJ's release of *Newark Kids Count 2013*.

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2013-2014 Annual Report

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Giving Every Child A Chance



Dear Friends,

As an advocate, I often catch myself taking the “glass half empty” approach in thinking about all that children in New Jersey need to grow up safe, healthy and educated. My sense of urgency and impatience often compel me to focus on what still needs to be done, rather than how far we have come.

This year marks my 30th anniversary with ACNJ. Thinking back to when I joined ACNJ as a part-time staffer, still in law school, makes me realize that we have made considerable progress for children. Almost 400,000 children are on a pathway to school success, thanks to our high-quality preschools, still the best in the country. Hundreds of thousands of children have received medical care, not just for immediate needs but to prevent future illness. Thousands of children

are living in permanent families, not lost in foster care, due to the laws and policies we helped change. Millions more school breakfasts have been served to hungry children. Glass half empty indeed!

So this year, I want to acknowledge how far we’ve come, even as I recognize what’s left to do. It helps us all to see that reaching our goals is possible and energizes us for the work ahead. I keep this quote from novelist Raymond Williams taped to my desk: “To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing.”

Thank you for all you do to keep hope possible for children in New Jersey.

Sincerely,

Cecilia Zalkind

Cecilia Zalkind, Executive Director



Dear Friends,

Each year, as we look back and assess our progress over the past 12 months, we usually see wins — some big, others small — but all are gains that make a true difference in the lives of thousands of children across New Jersey. In reviewing our progress this past year, I was struck by two long-term trends.

The results are remarkable.

In February, ACNJ examined 10-year trends in child well-being in Newark, New Jersey’s largest city. The study revealed that Newark children are significantly better off now than they were 10 years ago. The report found more children had health insurance, were attending preschool and enrolling in college, among other gains.

In July, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, one of our key national partners, celebrated its 25-year anniversary of publishing Kids Count by providing a historical look at child trends. Again, New Jersey showed tremendous progress over a 20-year period, including fewer 4th graders failing reading tests and more teens graduating on time from high school.

Both reports are an inspiring reminder that we are advancing — slowly but surely — toward making children a top priority in our state. At times, we feel frustrated by the slow pace of change and the growing political and fiscal road blocks in the way of achieving better results for kids. Yet, these historical perspectives are proof that together we do make a difference, that each day we are closer to achieving our goal of ensuring that every single child has the chance to grow up safe, healthy and educated.

As one of the thousands of people who speak up for kids, support our work and labor each day on behalf of New Jersey’s children, you are truly the cornerstone of our success. We look forward to many more years of successful advocacy. Our kids are counting on us.

Sincerely,

Richard Trenk

Richard Trenk, President, Board of Trustees

“I want to acknowledge how far we’ve come, even as I recognize what’s left to do.”

—Cecilia Zalkind

ACNJ News



December 2013

ACNJ launches series on child care

As thousands of New Jersey parents struggle to find and afford quality care for their young children, ACNJ launches a series of reports aimed at educating policymakers and the public on the challenges that working parents face.

The launch coincides with the state’s announcement of a federal grant to begin creating a system that rates child care providers and helps them improve the quality of care. This initiative was spearheaded by the Build Coalition, led by ACNJ.



January 2014

\$850 million in new funds for early learning

Congress passes a spending bill that includes major investments for young children, restores cuts to Head Start and provides \$850 million in new federal funds for early learning. A coalition led by ACNJ actively advocated for passage of this plan.

February 2014

State budget shows bump in federal funds for school breakfast

The governor’s proposed state budget anticipates \$21 million more in federal funding for school breakfast – the result of more districts serving “breakfast after the bell.” ACNJ has co-led the *NJ Food for Thought School Breakfast Campaign* since 2010, resulting in a 55 percent jump in school breakfast participation.



Creating an action plan for early literacy

ACNJ convenes a diverse group of more than 50 early childhood stakeholders to develop a plan for building an effective early learning system so all children read on target by 3rd grade. The group identified major barriers to effective early education from preschool through 3rd grade and developed concrete recommendations and an action plan to address the issues.

ACNJ takes a 10-year look at the well-being of Newark children

Newark Kids Count 2014, released at City Hall a few months before the mayoral election, highlights the progress and needs of Newark children over the past 10 years. The report was provided to incoming Newark Mayor Ras Baraka to help inform the new administration and guide critical decisions for Newark’s children.



Foster youth in court pilot advances

A pilot project aimed at increasing foster youth participation in court hearings launches in Burlington, Essex and Sussex Counties. Giving children and youth a voice at these hearings was the focus of a 2011 ACNJ policy brief. Since then, ACNJ has worked extensively with court staff and other stakeholders to make this vision a reality.

March 2014

Key local and state leaders discuss juvenile justice reforms

ACNJ convenes more than 200 local and state leaders and professionals in the juvenile justice field to discuss ways to build on successful juvenile justice reforms. Based on this important conversation, ACNJ is developing an advocacy agenda that will help more youth get on a productive path to adulthood.

April 2014

Kids Count event draws state and county leaders

ACNJ releases the annual *2014 NJ Kids Count* state report, county profiles and rankings and pocket guide, highlighting progress and needs for kids across the state. Keynote speaker Robert Prunetti, director of the MIDJersey Chamber of Commerce, discusses the importance of business leaders championing early care and education. Following the report release, ACNJ takes Kids Count on the road, offering four Kids Count forums across the state, helping local advocates craft action plans to improve the well-being of children in their own backyards.

May 2014

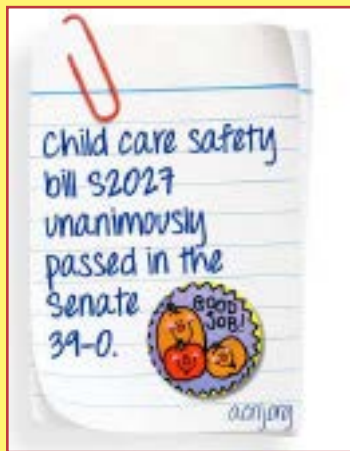
ACNJ’s special report looks at child nutrition in Newark

ACNJ releases a special report, *Heading Off Hunger: A Snapshot of Child Nutrition in Newark*, finding that a growing number of Newark children depend on school meals and food stamps to get the nutrition they need. The report is a first step toward painting a more comprehensive picture of the state of child nutrition in Newark.

June 2014

ACNJ Executive Director named among top 100 influential people

ACNJ Executive Director, Cecilia Zalkind is named one of New Jersey’s top 100 most influential people by The Star-Ledger.



Care Resource and Referral Agencies. The bill addresses a basic safety issue for the many children, primarily infants and toddlers, who spend their days in family care.

July 2014

Two decades of progress for NJ Kids

The Annie E. Casey Foundation releases its annual KIDS COUNT Data Book, with a special look at more than two decades of measuring the health and well-being of children. The report documents encouraging progress for New Jersey children, with more children attending preschool, fewer 4th graders failing reading tests and more teens graduating on time from high school.



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* Deceased

Thank You!