



for **ADVOCATES**
CHILDREN OF NEW JERSEY

Annual Update 2015

You Made Kids Count This Year!

With your support, we secured big victories for thousands of kids across New Jersey.

Wins that will improve their lives, our future...

Giving Every Child A Chance

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.

Solid Wins, Real-life Results

2015 was an extraordinary year for child advocacy in New Jersey! Your support made a difference for thousands of New Jersey children. In addition to this update, look for our formal annual report, (published semi-annually) in 2016.

What did we accomplish?

We fed thousands more hungry students.

"Breakfast after the bell" is sweeping New Jersey schools, ensuring that all children receive a healthy morning meal each school day. Our *NJ Food for Thought Campaign* released its 5th annual report this year, showing a 75 percent increase in the number of low-income children receiving breakfast at school. Not only are we feeding 100,000 thousand more hungry kids, we're bringing tens of millions in federal dollars back to New Jersey to benefit our children.



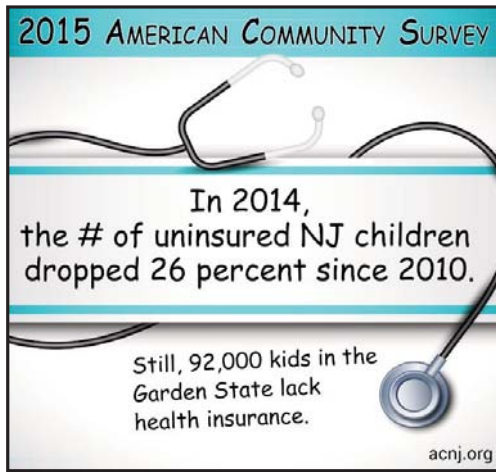
ACNJ Executive Director Cecilia Zalkind with Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno at the 5th Annual Release of the NJ School Breakfast Report



We prevented harmful cuts to health coverage for kids.

Threatened cuts to federal funding for health coverage would have reversed the tremendous progress we have made in recent years in reducing the number of uninsured children. With urging from advocates in New Jersey and across the nation, Congress approved continued funding of the Children's Health Insurance Program. That funding would have expired in October 2015.

These dollars help provide medical coverage to about 200,000 New Jersey children through NJ FamilyCare, the state's popular free and low-cost health coverage. When kids have coverage, they are more likely to see a doctor regularly, avoiding more serious illness that can derail them from a bright and healthy future.



We kept kids out of damaging isolation and adult prisons.

ACNJ, along with many partners, helped to shepherd through landmark legislation that will severely limit the use of solitary confinement of juveniles, which has shown to cause harmful psychological damage. This legislation also makes it more difficult to charge youth as adults and mandates that they be held in juvenile facilities where they can receive needed services, unless serious circumstances exist to warrant sending them to an adult prison.

While youth should be held accountable for their actions, the goal of the juvenile justice system is to return these youth to their communities equipped with the skills they need to stay out of trouble and mature into productive adults. These reforms are a step toward making that happen.



We helped parents make informed decisions about child care for their young children.

This year, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families posted a searchable database of inspection and violations reports of licensed child care centers statewide. The department also hired more child care inspectors to guarantee thorough inspections of these facilities.

ACNJ had recommended these changes in its 2013 report on child care and has since advocated with

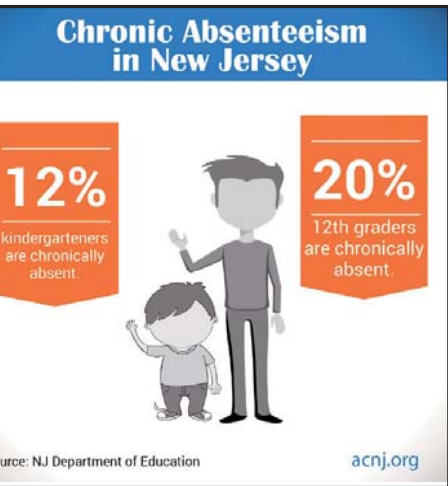
state officials. Parents can now get instant information about a center's compliance with state health and safety rules, giving them a critical tool when choosing where their children will spend their days while parents work.

We made sure more abused children have a say in their future.

This year, a pilot project that gives children in foster care a chance to go to court to talk to the judge and lawyers involved in their cases was expanded statewide. That means more youth will have a say in the decisions that directly affect their future. ACNJ published a report several years ago that helped spur this movement and was directly involved in crafting the Youth Participation in Court program.

We took steps to combat chronic school absenteeism.

In September, ACNJ released *Showing Up Matters, the State of Chronic Absenteeism in New Jersey*. As a direct result of the report, the New Jersey Senate introduced a bi-partisan bill that would mandate changes to address chronic absenteeism and improve student attendance across New Jersey.



We got closer to making preschool expansion a reality.

State legislative leaders are making preschool a cornerstone of a plan to invest in New Jersey's future. This is good news for tens of thousands of New Jersey's young students, who have waited far too long for quality preschool to come to their town.



We aren't quite there yet, but support is building to finally fund this critical early education, getting a strong boost from the Pre-K Our Way Campaign, which ACNJ helps lead.

Stay tuned. We may have more good news soon.

Visit www.acnj.org to learn more, get involved, and support our work.

A heartfelt thank you to all of our supporters for your steadfast dedication to New Jersey's children and for your generous donations to ACNJ in 2015. Our work would not be possible without you. (A full list of donors will be published in our 2016 Annual Report).

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