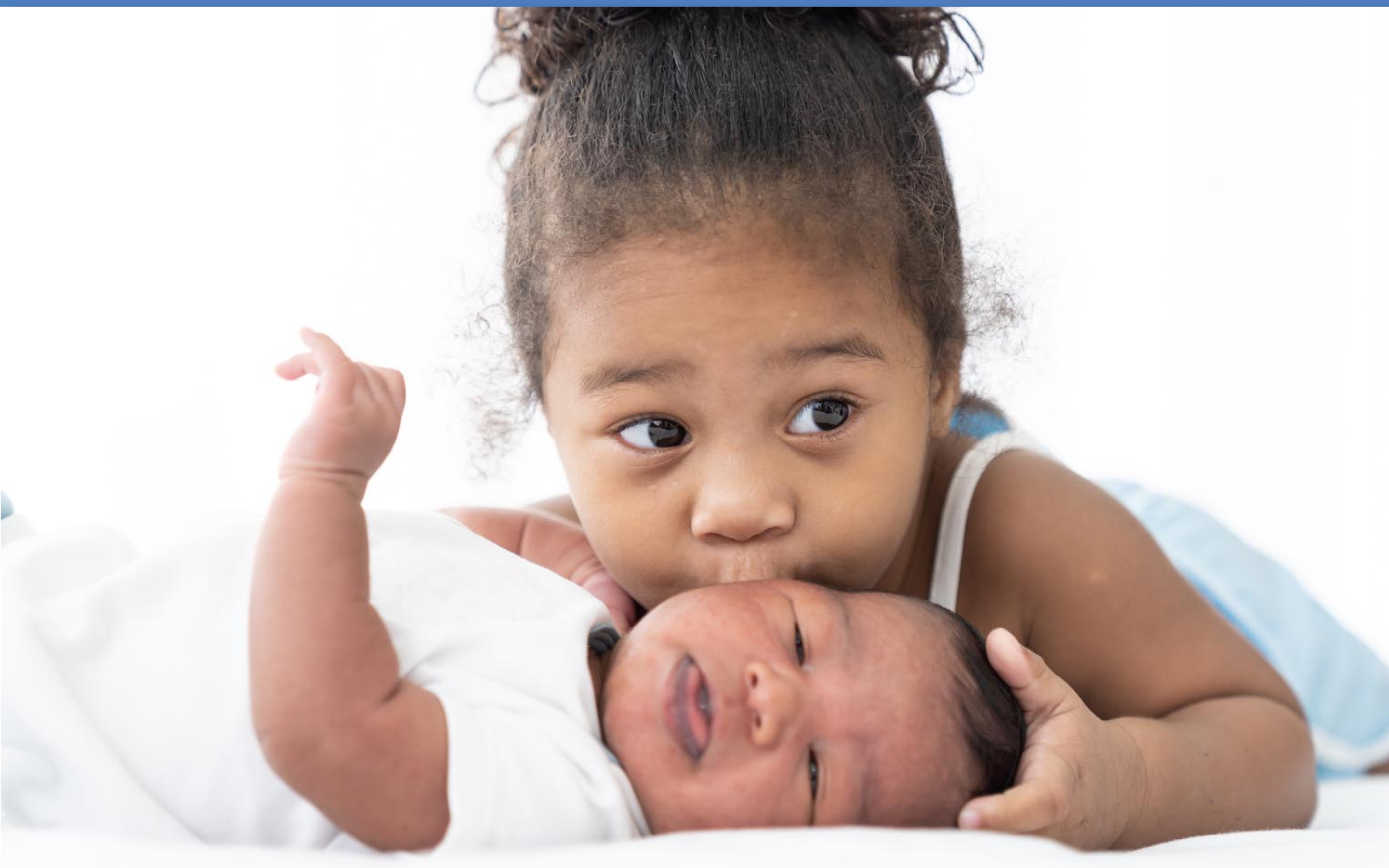




for **ADVOCATES**®
CHILDREN OF NEW JERSEY



2021 Annual Report

Giving Every Child A Chance®

Dear Friend,

As we look back on 2021, it is clear that our communities will be reeling from the pandemic for many years to come. COVID has magnified the systemic hardships that families have faced for far too long. But change happens when we raise our voices together.



Cecilia Zalkind
President & CEO



Sara Thom
Chair, Board of Trustees

It is a historic time for children. The American Rescue Plan provided significant and unparalleled federal funding for kids and families, including a substantial increase in the child tax credit, making dramatic changes that will benefit almost all families with children and potentially cut child poverty by more than 30 percent. Investments made in child care and a new universal home visiting law put the well-being of children at the forefront. It was your advocacy efforts, sounding the alarm for the needs of our youngest residents, that helped to make this happen.

But we know that our work is far from over. Children have been impacted by learning loss and isolation, and the need to address mental health challenges continues to grow. The urgency to transform our early childhood systems could not be greater. Families with babies and toddlers have been hit particularly hard. Often our youngest children— who lack access to mental health care—are overlooked. Child care providers—while helped by COVID relief funds—still cope with staff shortages and an uncertain future for their businesses. With the tremendous federal funding New Jersey recently received, ACNJ is fighting to ensure that those investments not only address existing issues but solve long-standing problems in our early care and education system.

As always, ACNJ's only agenda has been putting the needs of children first. Please join me in reflecting on this year's achievements, and as we look ahead to 2022, welcoming new opportunities to ensure every child has the chance to grow up safe, healthy and educated.

2021

January

In partnership with *Melinated Moms*, ACNJ welcomes its Parent Leadership Council, a group of parents actively engaged in advancing stronger laws and policies for New Jersey's babies and their families.



Nurture NJ, the First Lady's statewide maternal health awareness campaign, releases their strategic plan to combat the state's Black maternal mortality crisis, in alignment with ACNJ's Unlocking Potential prenatal-to-3 roadmap.

February

Coinciding with the release of our report, *Home Visiting: A Lifeline for Families During the Pandemic and Beyond*, ACNJ holds virtual visits with members of New Jersey's congressional delegation to discuss and advocate for this critical program, as well as other supports including child care.

March

NJ receives roughly \$10 billion in federal covid-relief (ARPA) funding that includes \$694 million for child care, \$16 million for Head Start; and \$1.2 million for home visiting.

NJ Kids Count Data is now updated on a quarterly basis in an effort to continue to highlight important trends impacting our state's children.



April

ACNJ teams up with First Lady Tammy Murphy, the NAACP of Atlantic City, Prematurity Prevention Initiative and Family Health Initiative for a roundtable discussion on the state of healthcare for Black and Brown mothers.

May

ACNJ begins its three-part #ReimagineChildCare webinar series, exploring ways the state can reform New Jersey's child care system.

Part one of *Newark Kids Count Data Snapshot: The Impact of COVID-19* reveals how Newark families utilized safety net programs during the pandemic.

EARLY CHILDHOOD HOME VISITORS

A LIFELINE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Home Visitors are supporting families in amazing ways.

#HOMEVISITINGISESSENTIAL

ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW JERSEY

ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW JERSEY

Newark Kids Count Data Snapshot

The Impact of COVID-19: A Look at the Utilization of Programs Assisting Families

Newark's Introduction

Introduction

While some of the public data reflecting the realities of the pandemic in Newark are not as readily accessible, programmatic data showing access to different types of resources and additional supports give us a closer insight into the experiences of Newark's families.

Deepening our Commitment to Addressing Race Equity Through Parent and Community Engagement

68 parent advocates trained in Find Your ROAR trainings

We all have a role to play in achieving racial equity and eliminating disparities that impact outcomes for children, families and communities. Inequities that predated the pandemic have also intensified as Black and Latino families experienced greater hardship as a result of the public health crisis. This past year, ACNJ sought input from young people, parents, caregivers and service providers on their solutions and lived experiences to better inform our advocacy.

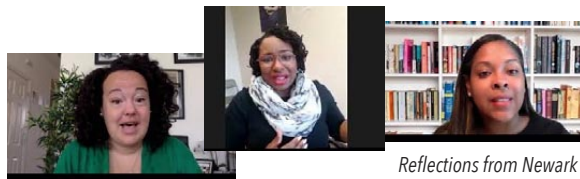
- ACNJ's partnership with Melineated Moms, an advocacy coalition for moms and women of color, helped build a community of parent leaders positioned to shape policy for New Jersey's families.
- The compelling testimonies from parents and child care providers at meetings with elected officials and state decision-makers helped drive the message that babies and families must be a priority.



Newark youth share how the pandemic affected their learning and employment prospects



Screenshot of a virtual public hearing convened by the state Assembly Women and Children's Committee on child care



Reflections from Newark service providers on the impact of COVID-19.



Parent advocates from ACNJ's parent leadership council facilitated group discussions at Strolling Thunder NJ.



June

New Jersey Parents

It's time to tell your legislators what your babies need to thrive.

#REIMAGINEchildcare

Strolling Thunder NJ 2021 brings together parents across the state to develop recommendations on how state leaders could use the nearly \$1 billion in federal child care funding allocated to New Jersey to help working families.

ACNJ and its partners at the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) begin preschool expansion outreach efforts with school districts.

At a public hearing before the NJ Department of Human Services on the state's Child Care Development Fund Plan, ACNJ speaks on the historic opportunity to change New Jersey's child care paradigm now and in the future with the use of the American Rescue Plan Funds.

New Jersey signs legislation permitting students receiving special education services who turned 21 in the 2021 school year to receive an additional year of special education and related services, if the parent and the individualized education program (IEP) team determine that the student requires them, including transition services.



Part two of Newark Kids Count Data Snapshot: The Impact of COVID-19 highlights how the pandemic has affected young people in Newark and their future educational and financial prospects.

Statewide universal home visiting program becomes law, guaranteeing new parents at least one free home visit from a nurse within two weeks of their child's birth. Creating an infrastructure for a universal home visiting system was one of the key goals in ACNJ's 2020 Unlocking Potential prenatal-to-3 plan.

Governor Murphy signs three landmark bills to combat lead poisoning, including an effort to replace all lead pipes within the next decade.

N.J. takes action against lead

New regs designed to eliminate lead in homes, including ...

- All N.J. rental properties built before 1978 must be inspected and have lead removed.
- All lead water service lines in N.J. are to be removed within the next 10 years.

July

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families and ACNJ convenes a virtual forum to highlight current trends and upcoming innovations in the practice of child welfare and well-being in the Garden State.

Seizing the Moment for Babies and Families

In response to the pandemic, Congress made unprecedented investments, which reflect lessons learned about the various supports that families need. This includes the enhanced federal child tax credit, a historic achievement in cutting child poverty, potentially lifting 89,000 New Jersey children above the poverty line. The Garden State also received nearly \$1 billion in child care relief funding through the American Rescue Plan and other federal aid.

Nearly
1,500
of early childhood
champions
engaged in direct
advocacy

23 ACNJ-facilitated
Zoom meetings with
the offices of all members
of New Jersey's
congressional and U.S.
Senate delegation on the
topic of child care and
home visiting

How New Jersey Will Use the Federal Stimulus ARPA Dollars on Child Care:

- Waive parent copays in the child care subsidy program through the end of 2023.
- Provide an additional \$300 per month per child for subsidy payments until the end of 2023.
- Provide \$1,000 bonuses to help child care providers recruit new workers and retain existing staff.
- Offer grants of \$20,000 - \$80,000 to center-based child care providers to help stabilize their operations, including increased wages and facilities improvements. Family child care homes are eligible for grants up to \$2,000.
- Provide family child care providers enrolled in Grow NJ Kids (New Jersey's child care quality rating and improvement system) with increased subsidy reimbursements based on increased levels of quality.
- Provide incentives to child care programs to offer evening, weekend and non-traditional hours of care.

Other Federal/State Achievements

- New Jersey became the second state in the nation to pass a statewide universal home visiting law, allowing parents the opportunity to receive at least one home visit from a nurse within two weeks of their child's birth at no expense.
- Expanded Medicaid coverage of new mothers for 365 days postpartum.
- \$50 million in preschool expansion funding.
- \$100 million in federal child care funding for facilities improvements and employee supports.
- Increasing the eligibility for the Child Dependent Care tax credit to allow families that earn up to \$150,000 to take advantage of the tax credit, more than doubling the number of families qualifying for the credit.
- \$2.45 million to support NJ's existing evidence-based home visiting programs.
- \$20 Million in the Cover All Kids Initiative that will help maintain current health care coverage for low-income families and help enroll the estimated 90,000 children who remain uninsured.
- \$83 million to increase the child care subsidy reimbursement rates for center-based child care and assist programs in addressing the January 1, 2022 minimum wage increase.



September

Governor Murphy announces 10-year vision to bring universal preschool to New Jersey.



ACNJ kicks off the #NJVotes4Kids campaign, hosting a South Jersey Kids Count forum discussing data relevant to children in the southern part of our state, as well as offering opportunities to speak up for children in the upcoming election.

HealthySteps, an evidence-based program of ZERO TO THREE, recently implemented and integrated into four pediatric practices in New Jersey. ACNJ hosted a webinar on this program, which provides families with support to promote social and emotional development.

ACNJ's partner, ReadyNation highlights the pandemic's impact on women in the workforce, citing the lack of child care as the main driver and actions to take to remedy the problems.

October

ACNJ president/CEO Cecilia Zalkind participates in a child care roundtable with Vice President Kamala Harris, Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill and Governor Phil Murphy, focused on the critical importance of child care to parents and to the economy, particularly for women in the workforce.

New Jersey becomes one of only four states that have adopted and implemented the five effective policies essential to the healthy growth and development of infants and toddlers outlined in the 2021 Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap, funded by the Pritzker Children's Initiative.

Dr. Walter Gilliam, Professor of Child Psychiatry and Psychology at Yale University, helps kick off "Celebrate Babies Week," with a webinar focused on the impact the pandemic has had on the social-emotional well-being of young children, families, and the early childhood workforce.

November

Pennies to the Dollar: The Investment Gap for New Jersey's Earliest Learners reveals how little federal and state funding goes towards early childhood education and supports for children from birth to age 3.

ACNJ Invites You To Our

6th Annual
Breakfast Celebration
Generation COVID: Lessons Learned,
Opportunities Ahead

Wednesday, December 8, 2021 at the
Clubhouse at Galloping Hill Golf Course,
Kenilworth, New Jersey



Join Us

December

ACNJ's 6th Annual Breakfast! Our featured presentation, *Generation COVID: Lessons Learned, Opportunities Ahead*, will include healthcare and education professionals discussing how COVID-19 has impacted our children's learning, and how we can work together to improve outcomes and give a voice to our youngest residents.

On the Ground Advocacy

Combating learning loss and ensuring transparency and accountability within the child protection system

- ACNJ's outreach via community presentations, blog posts and direct assistance to parents and professionals helping children and families provided needed updates on state guidance and assistance to students struggling in school because of COVID-19 shutdowns.
- ACNJ kept its network and the public updated on latest child welfare reforms via blog posts and joint webinars with the NJ Department of Children and Families.

- **245** parents/caregivers and professionals received information and assistance regarding the legal rights of children.
- **1,170** stakeholders participated in virtual forums on improving child welfare, sponsored by ACNJ and the NJ Department of Children and Families.
- **210** parents, caregivers and advocates trained on education law and advocacy.



BLOG JUN 2021
BLOG: Special Education Students Turning 21 in 2021 Entitled to Another School Year



BLOG JUL 2021
BLOG: Kinship Care and New Jersey's Revised Kinship Legal Guardianship Act



BLOG AUG 2021
All Positive About DCF Progress in Federal Court Hearing



BLOG AUG 2021
Report on Progress Being Made by NJ Department of Children and Families



BLOG APR 2021
What Parents Should Know Regarding School's Obligations for Compensatory Education for Children with Disabilities



BLOG JAN 2021
Being a Strong Advocate - Know When to Request Advocacy Assistance for your Child's Education During the Pandemic



BLOG JUN 2021
Solution Based Casework Model to be Implemented for DCP&P-Involved Families



ANNOUNCEMENT JAN 2021
Federal Monitor Reports that NJ is Making Progress in Child Welfare Reform Efforts

About Us

Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) is the trusted, independent voice putting children's needs first for more than 40 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.***

Be part of the
158,000+
visits to acnj.org

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Connect with ACNJ?**



www.acnj.org

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 2020. Our work would not be possible without you.

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