

ANNUAL | 2023 | REPORT



for **ADVOCATES**[®]
CHILDREN OF NEW JERSEY

Giving Every Child A Chance[®]



Mary E. Coogan, Esq.
President & CEO

DEAR FRIEND:

AS ACNJ's new president and CEO, I am excited to lead the efforts to continue our mission of giving every child the chance to grow up safe, healthy, and educated.

Centering the voices of children and families is critical to ACNJ's advocacy. Our #NJVotes4Kids Campaign engaged students with legislative candidates by sharing issues that matter to them. Our annual Strolling

Thunder NJ event connected parents with their state and federal lawmakers to advocate for what families need to thrive. In addition, we graduated our second class of Newark Future Policymakers, who developed policy solutions to address community concerns. We also engaged with hundreds of parents statewide to develop our agenda to support the healthy growth and development of children, prenatal to age 3, and their families.

ACNJ is a reflection of all the committed individuals — our strong partners, community advocates, parents and the amazing staff and board — who help shape and advance our wins for children. Our organization has “one mission, many faces.” We look forward to embarking on a multiyear *Unlocking Potential* plan, working with parents, community and state partners, and our funders, to eliminate the barriers of access that prevent our youngest children from thriving in five under-resourced communities.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize ACNJ's senior policy analyst, Cynthia Rice, who after a 31-year tenure at ACNJ, is retiring at the end of this year. Her dedication to improving the lives of children and families, her expertise and experience in policymaking, and her deep connections with community partners and lawmakers have contributed significantly to ACNJ's collective success. She will always be part of the ACNJ family and we wish her well as she begins her next chapter.

A special thank you to our donors, partners, and our Board of Trustees, who provide the support that allows ACNJ to remain independent and focused on our sole mission — helping children.



Charles Venti
Chair,
Board of Trustees

DEAR FRIEND:

IT was a year of change at ACNJ. We ushered in new leadership, with Mary Coogan at the helm and welcomed Winifred Smith-Jenkins, our new Director of Early Learning Policy and Advocacy.

It was also a year of opportunity. We continued our commitment to engage parents and community members in our advocacy work, valuing their lived experiences and their input for solutions to improve outcomes for children. We expanded our reach by engaging local stakeholders in community Kids Count data conversations to actuate change for children.

As Chair of the ACNJ Board of Trustees, I am proud of ACNJ's steadfast commitment to give every child a chance to grow up safe, healthy, and educated. Despite the challenges of the pandemic over the last several years, that goal has helped ACNJ sustain important gains for children, from expanding access to high-quality public preschool to securing strong investments for our youngest residents and those who care for them.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without you — our donors, partners and so many individuals dedicated to improving outcomes for children. It is your support that enables ACNJ to remain a strong, independent and effective voice for children.

2023

● JANUARY

► **Babies have Mental Health Needs Too**, ACNJ's policy brief, makes the case for supporting increased investments in infant mental health services.

► **Building on Trenton's 2019 Kids Count data book**, ACNJ releases the city's **third edition**, revealing the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected the city's children and families.



● FEBRUARY

► In partnership with The Burke Foundation, the Princeton Area Community Foundation and the Smith Family Foundation, **ACNJ holds its first series of Trenton Kids Count community conversations** focused on developing solutions to improve child outcomes in the city.



● MARCH

► **Still No Room for Babies: Child Care Staffing Crisis Impacts Supply of Infant-Toddler Child Care**, highlights the widespread shortage of infant and toddler child care.

► In recognition of her leadership and nearly 40 years of service, **ACNJ celebrates Cecilia Zalkind's retirement**, raising \$65,000 for the Cecilia Zalkind Parent Fellowship. Thank you so much!





▲ Congressman Andy Kim speaking Vibha Weimer, owner of Lightbridge Academy in Delran, NJ



◀ Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill calling for significant investments to address the looming child care "funding cliff" as American Rescue Plan funds expire.

CHILD CARE IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Federal COVID-relief aid served as a lifeline to countless direct-service providers including New Jersey's child care professionals.

Child care providers have used the money to raise teachers' pay, buy supplies, improve their facilities, and most importantly, stay open. The funds also have allowed the state to waive parent copayments, making child care more affordable for families who qualify for subsidized care.

Now, as federal aid winds down and child care providers face a steep drop off in critical funding, ACNJ is urging Congress to act quickly. New Jersey may be at risk of losing roughly 1,300 child care programs, affecting more than 100,000 children. This could cost New Jersey millions in family earnings and employer productivity.

In addition to working with national partners, ACNJ is calling on state and federal lawmakers to sustain these critical investments and enact long-term solutions that support children, families, and local economies.

Total Federal Child Care COVID-Relief Funding NJ Received:
\$10.2 Billion

Budget/Legislation Achievements:

On June 30th, Governor Murphy signed into law the largest budget in state history – \$54.5 billion for FY2024.

And there were some big wins for children and families. Two of those wins were a direct result of ACNJ's advocacy efforts:

- \$500,000 to establish a program that provides an enhanced payment for well-child and sick visit claims submitted for children under 4 years of age at HealthySteps sites. HealthySteps is a program that provides early childhood development support to families in a pediatric health care setting.
- A resolution to encourage more partnerships with community child care providers as eligible school districts expand their preschool programs to full-day.

Other Wins in Education and Child Care

- An extension of the child care subsidy payments based on enrollment, not attendance.
- Continuing the \$300/monthly child care subsidy family differential payment.

● APRIL

▶ **The Salem Kids Count Regional Forum brings together** community members, advocates, and elected officials to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing families in the southern county.

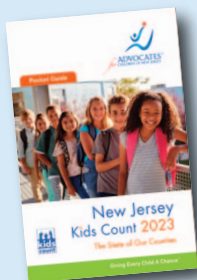
▶ A new report highlights the positive impact of the **New Jersey College Credit Transfer Law, developed with ACNJ's input in 2008.** This law allowed child care teachers to transfer college credits between 2-year and 4-year colleges seamlessly, allowing them to meet quality preschool standards set by Abbott v. Burke State Supreme Court decision.

▶ **ACNJ begins a series of focus groups with family child care providers across the state** to assess the impact of federal COVID-relief funds to stabilize the child care system.

● MAY

▶ **ACNJ and its partners at the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) begin preschool expansion outreach efforts with parents, providers and school districts.** This year, the state announced that any NJ school district providing full-day kindergarten is now eligible for pre-k expansion aid.

▶ **ACNJ's NJ Kids Count 2023 County Pocket Guide: The State of Our Counties,** provides the latest data on how children are faring across the Garden State and among its 21 counties. This year's report includes new indicators like Estimated Food Insecure Child Population as well as many data indicators disaggregated by race.



● JUNE

▶ For the first time since the pandemic, **babies and their families from all 50 states and DC are back on Capitol Hill, meeting with their member of Congress as part of ZERO TO THREE's Strolling Thunder event** to bring attention to what babies need to thrive.

▶ At the state level, **parents across New Jersey meet with their local lawmakers for a virtual conversation about their experiences raising a baby in New Jersey** and the programs and policies they need to support their child's healthy development.

▶ New Jersey's largest city is growing and becoming more diverse, with **Newark children making up 24% of its total population and more than half ages 5 and older speaking a language other than English in their home,** according to ACNJ's data book **Newark Kids Count 2023.**



◀ Senator Cory Booker (left), Congressman Bill Pascrell, Jr. (center) and Assemblyman Gary Schaer (right) at Children's Day Preschool and Family Center with Executive Director Susan M. Dannemiller (second from right) and ACNJ staff in Passaic, NJ.

On the Road: KIDS COUNT Community Conversations



Every year, ACNJ releases statewide and local Kids Count data publications with the goal that local residents, policymakers, and elected officials will use the information to drive change in their community. Hundreds of residents attended community conversations throughout the state to connect, identify opportunities for growth, and develop concrete solutions.

\$116 M

for state-funded preschool (Preschool Education Aid), \$40 million of which will go towards expanding public preschool in new districts.

- Continuing the family subsidy copay waiver.
- \$20 million to support the creation of a Social Impact Investment Fund, which will provide below-market loans for socially conscious projects in distressed communities, including child care facilities.

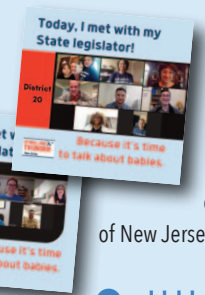
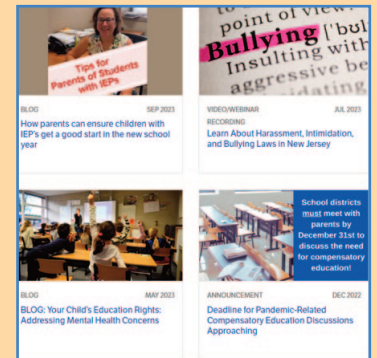
Health Care and Family Services

- \$2.5 million for Perinatal Workforce Training and Education.
- \$15.6 million for New Jersey's Universal Newborn Home Nurse Visitation Program.

KIDLAW: An Invaluable Resource on Student and Education Rights

Our Kidlaw Resource Center has continued to respond to an increasing number of case advocacy calls, providing information and support to parents of children and youth.

Over the past year, ACNJ provided information and assistance to 500 parents, caregivers, and professionals regarding the legal rights of children and school-related concerns. ACNJ's website also contains numerous recorded webinars, trainings and guides.



▶ ACNJ conducts a series of congressional visits with the offices of US Representatives Andy Kim, Chris Smith, Bonnie Watson-Coleman, Mikie Sherrill, and Rob Menendez, to discuss the critical need for significant child care federal funding. ACNJ completed meetings with the offices of all members of New Jersey's Congressional and U.S. Senate delegation.

● JULY

▶ ACNJ's second class of Newark Future Policymakers graduates. These Future Policymakers worked to identify policy solutions to improve the lives of Newark residents and presented their ideas to a panel of esteemed guests in a final symposium.

● AUGUST

▶ After hosting its first Middlesex County Kids Count Regional Forum in June, ACNJ holds its second community conversation on improving outcomes for children and families.

● SEPTEMBER

▶ ACNJ kicks off the #NJVotes4Kids campaign with a video contest inviting students to share issues that matter to them with legislative candidates and explain why it's important to vote.

● OCTOBER

▶ As part of "Celebrate Babies Week," ACNJ's webinar on early relational health (ERH) examines the importance of relationships in child development and explores opportunities to advance ERH state policies and programs.

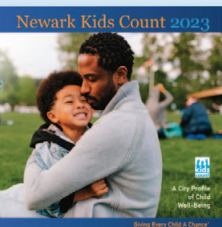
▶ ACNJ President/CEO Mary Coogan presents on Kids Count data at the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect Conference on The Intersection of Race, Poverty, and Neglect in Child Welfare.



● DECEMBER *Join Us!*

Thu. Dec. 7 at 8 am
8th Annual Breakfast Celebration.
"Moving Forward with Social Media"

Register at ACNJ.org



ACNJ's Cynthia Rice Retiring This Year



Cynthia Rice, senior policy analyst for Advocates for Children of New Jersey, will retire at the end of 2023, after 31 years of service. Known to most as “Cyndie,” her expertise and decades-long experience in policymaking, keen sense of political strategy, and strong relationship-building have helped advance many of ACNJ’s wins for children. Whether meeting with lawmakers in Trenton or at the nation’s capitol, her sole focus has always been improving the lives of children.

Key Accomplishments:

- Leading the effort year after year to increase funding for preschool expansion and providing direct advocacy support to child care providers, parents, and school administrators to expand pre-K in their districts. Cyndie was instrumental in ACNJ’s effort to bring high-quality public preschool to thousands of 3- and 4-year-olds, beginning with the state Supreme Court landmark decision, “Abbott v Burke,” which mandated public preschool in 31 of the state’s poorest districts. Since its implementation in 1999, the number of districts with state-funded full-day, quality preschool has grown to 277, reaching more than 50,000 students every year.
- Her work on pre-K to 3rd grade alignment underscored the need to maximize and sustain the gains from preschool to ensure that children are reading on grade level by 3rd grade — a key factor in future school success.
- Ushering key legislation that have helped thousands of New Jerseyans, including the state’s College Credit Transfer Law known as the “Lampitt Law,” which made transferring credits from a community college to a four-year institution more seamless.
- Bringing attention to the long-term implications of student absences, leading to the state’s chronic absenteeism law.
- Leading numerous legislative and congressional visits that included both child care providers and parents to amplify their critical needs. This included advocacy efforts to secure and strategically utilize the American Rescue Plan Funds, which served as a critical lifeline to New Jersey’s child care system.

Her skills in building relationships with policymakers, practitioners, and other advocates, have contributed in



large part to ACNJ’s advocacy success. She has received numerous awards in recognition of her service and dedication to children, including NJAEYC’s 2021 Advocate of the Year Award, YWCA Northern New Jersey’s Walking The Talk Award and the NJAEYC 2023 Lifetime Achievement Award. Cyndie’s tenacity and humor will be deeply missed and we wish her the very best in retirement.

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Connect
with ACNJ?



www.acnj.org



@ACNJForKids

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**.*

A sincere thank you to all of our supporters for your steadfast dedication to New Jersey's children and for your generous donations to ACNJ in 2022. Our work would not be possible without you.

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11.29.2023