

Where'd You Get That Idea?

by Eric Karolak

When it comes to public policy, so often ideas seem to come out of the blue or to not reflect the reality you know from your program or your community. That's why it's so important to develop a relationship with policymakers at the local, state, and national levels. If an idea comes up, they'll be more likely to seek your input. And if there's a policy or a funding priority you don't think makes sense, you'll have a pre-existing connection to help you get it fixed.

A number of ideas, some good, some misguided or ill-informed, illustrate



Eric Karolak is Executive Director of the Early Care and Education Consortium, a public policy alliance of America's leading national, regional, and independent providers of quality early learning programs. ECEC

members operate more than 7,500 centers enrolling nearly 1 million children in all 50 states. Dr. Karolak previously led the National Child Care Information Center, the largest Federal clearinghouse focused on child care and early education for low-income families. He has worked closely with states developing the technical aspects of child care assistance programs, quality rating systems, and partnerships across early childhood programs. He has conducted policy research and fiscal analysis in the areas of child welfare, child care, women's labor force participation, and public housing, and has testified before several state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. Dr. Karolak also has served as an advisor to a national quality initiative, a non-profit child care center, a local government commission, and a metropolitan United Way.

how important it is that policymakers tap the expertise of teachers, directors, and other program implementers just like you.

An 8,000% Fee Hike

Take what happened in Arizona in 2009. The state budget made child care licensing 'self-funded,' eliminating all state funds for licensing, as one of many cuts to health and human services programs. This occurred quickly, with little informa-

tion about what the new fees would be, and virtually no opportunity for public input. Months later, the state revealed a fee structure that raised fees between 280% and more than 8,000%!

Self-funded licensing may sound like smart government and may make sense for a trucking company, but not in child care. For a center with an enrollment of 150 children, Arizona's new fee would have been more than \$13,000. And that was on top of huge cuts to child care



Buffy Owens
*Vice President and Preschool Division Director
Kama'aina Kids, Hawaii*

Ideas come to me mostly when I am not concentrating on that particular thing.

I tend to think of the end result and what I want and what I want it to look like. Then I work backward and section out what needs to be done to accomplish the end result.

As children we were expected to do well. Also we were given quite a bit of freedom to make our own decisions and "suffer" our own consequences if our decision was not one that was very smart.

My parents also talked about me to their friends when I was within 'earshot,' which I believe was done so that I would know they were proud of me. It was never negative, though a very disciplined family. Creativity was fostered, supported, and rewarded.

subsidies. That wasn't right, and providers in the Arizona Child Care Association spoke up. They held rallies, participated in public hearings at the Capitol and in Tucson, and generated a lot of media. After hearing what the likely impact on providers and families would be, the state identified other funds and developed a new program that substantially reduced the fee increase. While fees went from among the lowest in the nation to the highest, providers were able to stop devastating fees and obtain the best possible solution in a state with a desperate fiscal environment.

Rewarding Quality in the Market

One idea I think has great promise is state quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). About half of the states currently have a QRIS and quite a few more are developing them. Typically, these are voluntary rating systems that rate a provider according to a tiered set of program standards and aim to help participating programs achieve higher levels of quality, with monitoring and accountability, consumer awareness, and financial supports and incentives.

Done well, QRIS has the potential to complement the essentially private marketplace for child care, to encourage parent-consumers to seek higher quality programs, and to help programs reach higher levels of quality. That's a win-win.

Connie
Where do ideas come from?

The zoo; I like the zoo.

When do you get your ideas?

On my second birthday.

Submitted by Karen Graham
World Forum National Representative Wales

Vaiva, Ugnė, and Liepa
3 and 4 years

Where do you get your ideas?

We are enjoying the golden leaf rain and having collected them we rush to make ourselves hats and to decorate them.

Submitted by Elena Markevičienė, World Forum National Representative Lithuania
with Violeta Juozapavičienė and Jurgita Jurevičienė



But implementation is everything. For example, if consumers aren't aware of the ratings and their meaning, if they don't know what quality looks like and why it's worth paying more for, then they're not likely to demand higher quality.

Moreover, a recent report noted that only about 60% of all states paid higher reimbursement rates for higher-quality providers — and in approximately 80% of those states, even those higher rates were below the federally recommended level.¹ And just this year, in some of the leading QRIS states, quality achievement supports have come under attack in

budget debates. Quality costs, so to be effective QRIS must include these funded supports and incentives.

“Rates Don't Buy Quality”

One perplexing idea I've heard in some policy circles from state capitols to Washington, DC, is “rates don't buy quality.” The phrase is often used to argue against investing in improving the reimbursement rates states pay to child care providers on the grounds that it won't improve the quality of the care provided to children whose parents use child care assistance subsidies to help pay for care.

For providers, this is confusing to say the least. You know that the rates charged to parents determine the revenue available to your center; and since quality costs, how much revenue a program has is a key determinant of the level of quality it can deliver.

Now, low subsidy reimbursement rates do make it difficult for a parent to

Tracy Wambui, 3 years

When do you get your ideas?

When I am sleeping at night.

Submitted by Janet Ndeto Mwitiki
World Forum National Representative Kenya

"I must confess that this exercise has made me learn a lot in the process as I was asking children these questions. I visited three different ECD centres in three different catchment areas and the experiences were different."

access high-quality programs. *Low* subsidy rates force many centers to limit the number of subsidized families they accept or, in some cases, to forego participating in the child care assistance program at all. But that's not an argument *against* investing in rates; it's an argument for increasing those rates so parents can access a broader range of programs and so programs can improve quality.

To get beyond this notion that "rates don't buy quality," we'll need to make sure policymakers understand what we do with the revenue that comes to our program, to explain how quality can't be purchased on the cheap, and how parents need help in finding and choosing high-quality programs.

Put Child Care on the Map

The Early Care and Education Consortium, RESULTS, and the National Women's Law Center are partnering to encourage providers and other advocates to put child care on the map for our federal lawmakers. And we need your help!

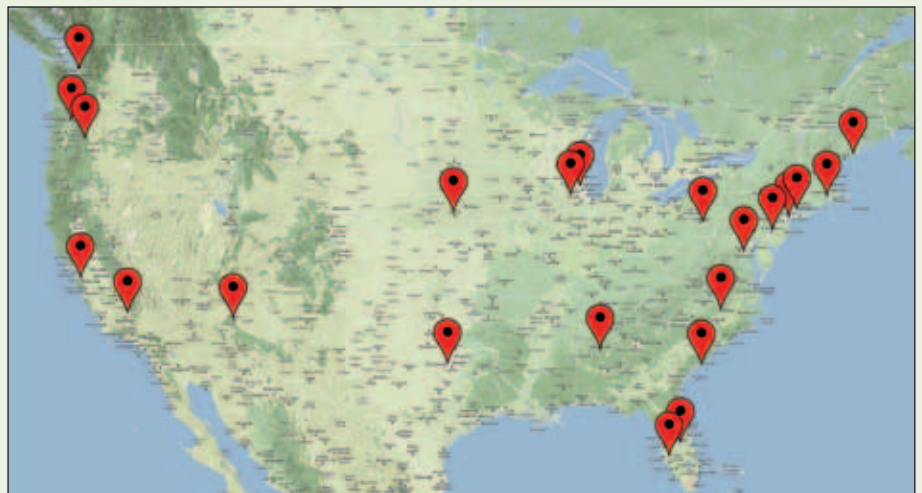
You know how important it is for families to have access to reliable, high-quality child care. You know that child care is early learning, and also a crucial support for working parents. You also know that good care is in short supply, and that in these tough times more and more

families need assistance with paying for child care.

The federal government plays a huge role in child care policy and funding, but child care isn't really front and center for too many Members of Congress. They need our help to know more, and to know how urgently we need their action for child care for working families.

We have a lot of ground to cover this year to make sure that every Member of Congress hears about child care in their community: everything from the early learning opportunities to the employers who count on staff to come every day; from subsidy assistance to tax credits to efforts to improve quality. They need to hear about the good things you're doing for young children in the classroom, and they need to hear about the challenges you face and the families you're not able to reach. *They need to hear from providers like you who know firsthand that child care matters.*

There are many other ideas and supporting resources to make it easy for you to put them into action. Then, after you've acted, tell us and we'll chart our successes on a national map. Visit ececonsortium.org and look for "Help Us Put Child Care on the Map!" Together, we'll put child care on the map for Congress!



Members of Congress will be in their state and district offices many times in the coming months. While they're back home and in your neighborhood, you can put child care on the map! We've collected ideas for simple activities like:

- deliver letters, drawings, or photos from child care programs to your district office
- write a letter to the editor of your local paper
- attend a town hall meeting and ask about child care when they're talking about jobs or education.



Emma, 3 years

Where do you get your ideas?

Everywhere.
But sometimes I don't
get any ideas at all!

Where do ideas come from?

From my mouth. And from
beds . . . and from toys.

When do you get ideas?

When I close my eyes.
Then I get ideas . . .

*Submitted by Maria Jyrimäe
World Forum National Representative Estonia*

**YOUR
RESPONSE
MAKES A
DIFFERENCE**
2012 Economic Census
business.census.gov

Economic Census this Fall

This fall, millions of businesses, including thousands of child care centers will receive 2012 Economic Census forms from the U.S. Census Bureau. This census is indispensable to understanding America's economy, and you'll appreciate how important it is for our sector to be included.

The census forms ask for basic information like your location, employment, payroll, and sales by type of product or service. Responses are confidential and businesses that receive a form are required by law to respond.

Taken every five years, the Economic Census is a valuable tool for business and government planning. State and local agencies use the data for eco-

nomics development and regional planning. It's also used by the private sector for business decisions. Visit business.census.gov to see what information is collected and how it's used.

Economic Census forms will be mailed during October through

December, and responses are required by law by February 2013.

Endnotes

- 1 Karen Schulman and Helen Blank, *State Child Care Assistance Policies, 2011: Reduced Support for Families in Challenging Times*, National Women's Law Center, October 2011.

