Putting Our Youngest Children First

Building a Movement for High-Quality Early Childhood Education

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Putting Our Youngest Children First is a new book that describes in great detail what can happen when a large and dedicated group of people come together to do what is best for the well-being of children. Focusing on the history of the Family Development Program (FDP), an initiative in the University of New Mexico's College of Education and Human Sciences, this book chronicles FDP's 40 years of experience as one of New Mexico's most powerful advocates for high quality early education and care. From the start and throughout its history, the leaders of FDP have understood that a community cannot flourish unless a strong system of early learning prevails. These leaders played a prominent role in shaping a statewide early childhood system that is community-based, family-driven and well-funded for all young children. FDP's approaches for engaging grassroots leadership sets a powerful and transformational example for other states to consider as they strive to build comprehensive early childhood systems of their own that truly work for the people using them.

Putting Our Youngest Children First offers a clear and hopeful path forward, first by demonstrating how to create the kind of early care programs that children, families and communities deserve, and second, by showing how to build the political will to give high quality programs unambiguous support. The book covers FDP's most significant phases of expansion and development for scaling up a grassroots initiative, capturing 4 important pathways that include:

I. Putting Our Children at the Center of the Civic Agenda

II. Mobilizing An Advocacy Network in Pursuit of Social Justice

III. Multiplying Collective Strengths for Early Childhood Systems Change

IV. Generating Public Will to Invest in Young Children

Each chapter of the book describes an initiative, program, or innovation that proved central in FDP's effort to make New Mexico one of the nation's early childhood leaders. These examples consider each topic in a larger, more inclusive sense as well, with clear implications for how to apply the lessons learned and adapt them to other places.

The legacy of an early childhood initiative being sustained for 40 years is a story in itself. But when this heritage is combined with four decades of grassroots leadership carried out by advocates from all across the State of New Mexico, it's clear why turning this story into a book feels necessary. This is especially true if such a book can make a lasting difference for young children and their families, not only in New Mexico, but for other state early childhood efforts as well.

The authors hope that family leaders and early childhood professionals at every level, including the next generation of students, will find inspiration and practical ideas to further their goals for building early childhood systems that are equitable and positively impact the lives of young children and their families.



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