

## Practice Brief Winter 2022

# Stepping into Early Childhood Advocacy

Both [state](#) and [national](#) recognition of the importance of high-quality early education and care for the economic, social, and mental well-being of children, families, and society has continued to increase.<sup>1</sup> Practitioners in the field of early childhood, students in higher education, business professionals, and parents can step into the role of advocate for early education and care to continue this focus and advance policies that will support children and families.

The goal of this practice brief is to illustrate some of the various ways those in Massachusetts can step into the role of early education and care advocate. The brief outlines recent advances in Massachusetts policies related to early education and care, reiterates the centrality of advocacy in continuing to achieve these gains, provides information about Massachusetts fellowships, certificates, and degree programs related to advocacy, shares real-life examples of two advocate's journeys, and issues recommendations for how you can take the first step into advocacy.

For this brief, the author reviewed recorded zoom exit interviews with advocates who completed the Strategies for Children Advocacy Network and conducted original interviews with former Strategies for Children interns, in addition to internet research.

## Recent Massachusetts Early Childhood Policy Advancements Highlight Advocacy Efforts

Recent [policy gains](#) in Massachusetts highlight the impact of, and continued need for, advocates who are focused on high-quality early education and care for all children in Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> This recent policy progress, supported through multiple advocacy efforts, includes:

- The [FY23 budget](#), which historically invests \$1.184 billion for the Department of Early Education and Care, including “\$250 million to support continued stabilization of childcare facilities” and “\$60 million for center-based childcare provider rate increases;”<sup>3</sup>
- The [recently signed](#) economic development bill [H.5374](#), “[invests in early education and care](#) in two major ways: providing an additional \$150 million to continue the C3 Stabilization Grants through the end of the fiscal year in June 2023, and an additional \$315 million in the newly created High-Quality Early Education and Care Affordability Fund.”<sup>4</sup>
- Bill [S.2973](#) now [S.2997](#), “An Act to expand access to high-quality, affordable early education and care,” which [passed the Senate](#) but not the House before the most recent legislative session ended in July 2022; and,<sup>5</sup>
- Bill [S. 3097](#), “An act addressing barriers to care for mental health,” which was [signed into law](#), includes provisions [considered crucial for young children](#).<sup>6</sup>

These recent policy initiatives and successes demonstrate the [focused efforts](#) of advocates across the state who work in direct interaction with or on behalf of children and families and reflect the growth of the state's understanding that high-quality early education and care is a critical need for all Massachusetts children.<sup>7</sup>

## Sustained Advocacy Requires Trained Advocates

Continued policy advancements will require [continued advocacy](#), and continued advocacy requires trained advocates.<sup>8</sup> Fellowship, certificate, and degree programs provide the structure and opportunity for participants to learn and practice these skills so that they are able to incorporate early education and care advocacy into their personal and professional lives.

As one organizational leader in the field of early education and care advocacy, [Strategies for Children](#) has established both local and national connections over our more than twenty years of work advocating for high-quality early education and care for all Massachusetts children birth to five.<sup>9</sup> As a nonprofit organization, we nurture and support the growth of advocates in multiple ways, such as partnering with local colleges and universities to host [interns](#), organizing a seven-week [Speakers' Bureau](#), and obtaining funding for our three-year, multi-cohort [Advocacy Network](#).<sup>10</sup> Strategies for Children supports the development of advocates within institutions of higher education and within the early education and care field through a combination of mentorship, power building, and connection. During recorded zoom exit interviews, participants shared what they have learned and what they have gained from participating in the first cohort of the Advocacy Network.

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### Former Advocacy Network Participants Highlight the Program's Positive Impacts<sup>11</sup>

“The most important thing I have learned about myself is just saying yes because...I have so much to share and I have so much to give to this world.”

“The change of the people who participated in this program is huge....how confidence increased, how knowledge increased.”

“The connections that I built through [Strategies for Children] have been fantastic.”

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In addition to Strategies for Children, many organizations and institutions of higher education in Massachusetts offer opportunities to build advocacy skills focused on early childhood.

## Aspiring Early Childhood Advocates Have Many, and Varied, Options for Advocacy Development

The recent emergence of an increased number of fellowship, certificate, and degree programs related to early childhood policy and leadership indicates the broad understanding of the centrality of advocacy within the early education and care ecosystem that includes direct-service practitioners, administrators and directors, those working within organizations that impact the field, and parents.<sup>12</sup> Various options for fellowships, certificates, and degrees related to early childhood policy, advocacy, and leadership exist for those who are early education and care practitioners in the field, for parents of young children, for those who are students in higher education institutions, and for those who hold professional-level roles in organizations.

An advocacy journey begins with the first step. The following two stories, from interviews conducted with a former Strategies for Children Advocacy Network participant and a former Strategies for Children intern, demonstrate two of the many ways that you may choose to step into the role of advocate for early education and care.

## Examples from the Field: Stepping into Advocacy<sup>13</sup>

### Sol\*: A business owner, a preschool teacher, and an advocate:

*Sol, the owner of and solo preschool teacher for her family child care business for more than twenty years, first learned about advocacy during a professional development leadership program. Delving deeper into advocacy work did not fit into her schedule at the time, as she had two small children and a new business, but the information she had learned stayed with her. Years later, when a colleague whom she had met through her local family childcare network nominated her to be a part of Strategies for Children's Speakers' Bureau, a seven-week advocacy training program, she felt that it was the right fit for her both personally and professionally. Sol wanted "to feel more comfortable speaking and advocating for colleagues and her neighborhood," and this opportunity "helped as a coaching mechanism to give [her] that confidence." From there, Strategies for Children asked Sol if she would be interested in joining the first cohort of their Advocacy Network, a year-long program for educator-advocates that builds their advocacy skills through experience and connects advocates across the state to create a system and infrastructure for advocacy. Participating in the Advocacy Network added to Sol's wealth of knowledge that she had developed as a preschool owner, as an early childhood educator, and as a member of the local family childcare network, the local chapter of a national educator association, and the Speakers' Bureau.*

*Now that Sol is connected to the world of advocacy, she feels not only that she is informed about what is going on both locally and nationally, but also that she is able to quickly "activate" her wide, and growing, network of colleagues and advocates by sharing this information and encouraging them to take action. She plans to stay involved in advocacy work by focusing on her current roles while also staying open to new opportunities.*

***Sol's advice to those interested in advocacy work: "We can be intimidated by the unknown, but we cannot just sit back and be unhappy with issues around us and not do anything. If you see an issue bothering you and that you want changed, going into advocacy is the way to go, the only way to make a difference. It may not seem like a big difference, but our voices matter. If we love what we do, if we are passionate about the work we are doing, involvement in some capacity is needed - to do the best for children and families. Even if you are afraid, just give it a try."***

*\*Name has been changed.*

**Abby\*: A former preschool teacher, a consultant, and an advocate:**

*Abby began her career as a Head Start preschool teacher through a national service corps organization. During the summer, she participated in a fellowship for educators within the service corps that introduced her to advocacy and to her mentor. Though Abby loved the complexity and problem-solving inherent in teaching preschool, she also loved advocacy work. She felt it was important to share the stories of her classroom experiences to close the gap between policy and practice. After the fellowship, with the help of her mentor, she began working for an advocacy organization, where she learned about community organizing and policy and where she continued to build and nurture her professional relationships. After she worked in another position in the early childhood field where she was able to see the implementation of policies, Abby went back to school. She entered a master's program and an early childhood advocacy fellowship program, through which she had the opportunity to intern with Strategies for Children, where she learned about legislative advocacy, about how to develop relationships as an advocate, and about how to build community systems. After graduation, she stayed at the school at the request of her professors to help with an initiative where she focused on early childhood leadership development. From there, she went to work for a nonprofit to build programs that addressed problems in early childhood at the community level and that developed strategies for advocacy.*

*In Abby's current consulting role regarding cost modeling projects for early childhood systems, she again works with her mentor from her first fellowship. She thinks that as she continues her career, whether as a consultant or as the leader of an organization, she will "be focused on building power among people who do not have enough power in the system." She notes that while she does not know where she will land, her past learning, projects, and relationships are always influencing her next steps.*

**Abby's advice to those interested in advocacy work:** *"The more exposure and relationships you build through fellowships or different kinds of learning enhancement programs, you never know when that is going to be helpful to you - it could be five, eight, fifteen years down the line. Be nice to people and stay in contact. Nurturing your relationships is key."*

*\*Name has been changed.*

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When and how to take your first step into advocacy is dependent upon your occupation, educational history, finances, and schedule. Some fellowships offer stipends, while a certificate or degree program may require tuition. Some programs may offer virtual and asynchronous content, while other programs are blended or in-person. The following fellowship, certificate, and degree programs are just a few examples of the local options available to those in Massachusetts who wish to step into advocacy work.<sup>14</sup>

FELLOWSHIPS	CERTIFICATES	DEGREE PROGRAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Advocacy Network</a> from <a href="#">Strategies for Children</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Year-long program for Massachusetts educator-advocates<sup>15</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">The 2023 CAYL Fellowship</a> from <a href="#">The CAYL Institute</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One-year fellowship open to Massachusetts residents<sup>16</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Grassroots Organizing and Advocacy Fellowship</a> from <a href="#">Neighborhood Villages Action Fund</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ten-month fellowship open to early education and care stakeholders and those interested in advocacy<sup>17</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Massachusetts Education Policy Fellowship</a> from <a href="#">Rennie Center</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ten-month professional development leadership and policy fellowship program for those in various education-related positions<sup>18</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Massachusetts Policy Fellowship</a> from <a href="#">Teach Plus</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Year-long fellowship program for Massachusetts teachers<sup>19</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">The Parent Leadership Program</a> from <a href="#">Families First</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A nine-month application-based program for parents that includes leadership and parenting advocacy trainings and the completion of a community impact project<sup>20</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">The Saul Zaentz Fellows Program</a> from <a href="#">Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative at Harvard Graduate School of Education</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ For students who are enrolled full-time HGSE’s Master’s Program or the Doctor of Education Leadership Program<sup>21</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Certificate in Early Childhood Policy and Leadership</a> from <a href="#">Boston College Institute of Early Childhood Policy</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ For students enrolled in master’s and doctoral programs<sup>22</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Boston University Wheelock College</a> of Education &amp; Human Development’s <a href="#">Child &amp; Youth Policy</a> and <a href="#">Education for Equity &amp; Democracy</a> Certificates           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Graduate-level program: Requires applicants to meet degree requirements<sup>23</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Quinsigamond Community College</a> Leadership in Early Education and Care Certificate           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ For current or aspiring early childhood center directors and supervisors<sup>24</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Saul Zaentz</a> Early Education Initiative at Harvard Graduate School of Education <a href="#">Certificate in Early Education Leadership (CEEL)</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Job-embedded online program<sup>25</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">UMass Boston</a> College of Education and Human Development (<a href="#">Institute</a> for Early Education Leadership and Innovation) <a href="#">Early Education Research, Policy, and Practice, Post-Master’s Certificate</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 12-credit program in a blended format<sup>26</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Boston University Wheelock College</a> of Education &amp; Human Development’s <a href="#">MA in Leadership, Policy &amp; Advocacy for Early Childhood Well-Being</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “For professionals in early childhood-focused fields seeking professional preparation to advocate on behalf of young children (birth to eight years) and families”<sup>27</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Child, Youth and Family Policy Concentration</a> in the <a href="#">Master of Public Policy</a> Program at The <a href="#">Heller School</a> for Social Policy and Management at <a href="#">Brandeis University</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child, Youth and Family Policy Concentration within the two-year master’s program “prepares graduates for a wide variety of leadership roles in organizations that foster the healthy development of children, youth, and families”<sup>28</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Early Education and Care in Inclusive Settings (EECIS) BA</a> at the <a href="#">UMass Boston College of Education and Human Development</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Includes a <a href="#">Leading for Change</a> Program option where students take an undergraduate leadership course<sup>29</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Recommendations for Stepping into Advocacy

The following are some recommendations as to how to begin to take the first step to becoming an advocate for early education and care:

- Join the mailing list of one or more [advocacy organizations](#) in Massachusetts, such as [Strategies for Children](#), [Common Start Coalition](#), [Massachusetts Early Childhood Funder Collaborative](#), and/or [Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education](#);<sup>30</sup>
- Attend an informational session for one of the aforementioned fellowship, certificate, or degree programs;
- Reach out to those in advocacy organizations or to program alumni to ask questions or to request a meeting in order to learn more about their experiences and their work and to build relationships and expand your professional network; and
- Apply to a fellowship, certificate, or degree program that best meets your professional interests, qualifications, finances, and schedule.

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