

Working to support and nurture the rights and needs of young children.

## **What is the problem?**

In many early childhood classrooms, the current emphasis on standards and testing has led to a focus on assessing children at the expense of meeting their developmental needs and teaching them meaningful content. Increased academic demands have led to the loss of play and activity-based, hands-on experiences that young children need in order to lay the foundation for later school success. The over-use of standards and assessment stifles children's natural love of learning, their opportunity to develop imagination, critical thinking, and creative problem solving skills. Worst of all, the heaviest burden from this premature academic focus falls on children who live in poverty and who attend schools in low-income communities.

## **What is the answer?**

1. Eliminate labeling and ranking of children based on standardized tests.
2. Use assessments that are ongoing and evolving and connected closely to observations of children, their development and learning, and to a child-centered curriculum.
3. Provide classrooms where teachers engage in well-thought out and intentional extensions/expansions of children's play and learning in ways that demonstrate knowledge and respect for each child's uniqueness.
4. Provide children with literacy experiences that include storytelling, quality children's literature, and dramatic reenactments that grow out of their experiences rather than activities that isolate and drill discrete skills.
5. See and appreciate what children *can* do and understand without focusing on learning everything earlier.
6. Provide a school environment that respects the language and culture of children and their families, encourages families to take ownership, and insures that their history and experiences are included and valued.
7. Offer school schedules that provide ample time for families and school personnel to meet and work together.
8. Realize the critical role of early childhood teachers, whose work is as important as that of those who teach PhD candidates, and compensate them as such.
9. Remember that children are intrinsically active learners from the time they are born and that learning happens in and out of a school building in unique ways.
10. Provide children and families with access to high quality, affordable child care and after-school care.

## **What can we do together?**

Take this information to your neighbor, children's teachers, parent groups, school board and legislative bodies. Ask them to support efforts to bring best practice back to the education of young children. Stay informed and involved with the organizations that advocate for young children - such as Defending the Early Years ([deyproject.org](http://deyproject.org)), Alliance for Childhood ([allianceforchildhood.org](http://allianceforchildhood.org)), Save Our Schools ([saveourschoolsmarch.org](http://saveourschoolsmarch.org)) and Parents Across America ([parentsacrossamerica.org](http://parentsacrossamerica.org)).

## **What can families do at home?**

1. Provide young children with space and time to play at home and in the neighborhood.
2. Read good quality children's books and limit screen time.
3. Resist reinforcing the school's agenda - drilling for skills - and replace it with opportunities for meaningful learning.

Defending the Early Years (DEY) seeks to rally educators to take action on policies that affect the education of young children. DEY is a non-profit project of the Survival Education Fund, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt educational organization based in Watertown, Massachusetts. Find more information at [deyproject.org](http://deyproject.org) or write to [geraldbywater@gmail.com](mailto:geraldbywater@gmail.com).