

Engaging Your Community: A Companion Discussion Guide to Get the Conversation Going

Goal of Community Conversations

Help community members connect with the impact of the early childhood education (ECE) sector and workforce, and identify ways they are personally impacted by an ECE system that is underfunded and unable to meet the greater need for early care and learning programs across New York State, even if they don't initially believe it affects them.

Directions

After viewing the ESCCC workforce PSA video, engage community members in a discussion to explore the deeper impacts of an underfunded ECE sector and workforce on their state, local community, and personal lives. By leading this exploratory discussion, we strengthen both known champions and potential champions in their ability to lead powerful conversations with local and state leaders, as well as their wider networks, to highlight the consequences of neglecting the ECE sector and workforce.

"It has been said that something as small as the flutter of a butterfly's wing can ultimately cause a typhoon halfway around the world." ~ Chaos Theory

Discussion Prompts

These are suggested prompts – please feel free to build upon the conversation and adapt questions to engage your audience and explore shared thoughts in greater depth.

Opening the Conversation

- **Early care educators are "the workforce behind the workforce."** How does this statement resonate with your experiences with or observations of the ECE workforce? What is the larger impact of this sector and workforce?

Exploring Root Causes

- For too long, the care sector—including the early care and learning workforce—has been underfunded, under-resourced, and undercompensated. What do you think drives this persistent undervaluation of the care work?
- Why do these practices continue despite the critical importance of this work?

Personal and Community Impact

- Pause and reflect: How does the undercompensation of early childhood educators impact:
 - Family stability in your community?
- Overall community stability and economic health?
- Think about your own experience:
 - Have you or someone you know struggled to find quality, affordable child care?
 - **How did that impact work decisions, career growth, or family wellbeing?**

Economic Connections

- **“Research on early care and education programs finds that \$1 in spending generates \$8.60 in economic activity,”** (Abbott, S., 2021, Washington Center for Equitable Growth).
 - What immediate economic benefits do you see when families have access to quality, affordable care?
 - What long-term economic impacts might result from robust investment in early childhood education?

Moving Forward

- **Considering everything we've discussed:** What's one way this issue connects to something you care about in your community?
- Who in your network might be surprised to learn how ECE affects them personally?
- What's one action you feel motivated to take after this conversation?