

Early Childhood Development and Family Well-Being

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO • OCTOBER 8-9, 2018

On October 8th and 9th 2018, Ascend at the Aspen Institute partnered with the Bezos Family Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Center for Native American Youth for the New Mexico Forum on Early Childhood Development and Family-Wellbeing in Albuquerque, NM. The convening brought together over 110 leaders across

Testimonials

“Having the convening over Indigenous Peoples Day accentuated the importance of our present moment and the challenges of our own history, while pathways to recovery were also made apparent by the presenters. Thank you for this informative, powerful, and moving experience.”

“[I] am grateful for the opportunity to hear a myriad of voices, experiences, and approaches to strengthening families and communities. So much of what discussion reinforced what we, in New Mexico, have innately known and it's so reassuring to know that the wisdom of our land, history, and ancestors continue to thrive today, but we must reinforce it constantly in all venues.”

New Mexico to advance three goals: to inspire, provide a sense of ‘what is possible,’ and build relationships among early childhood practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and advocates across New Mexico; to recognize existing and identify best and next practices and policy opportunities that are ‘ripe’ for potential implementation; and to identify learning opportunities that inform next steps and partnerships by New Mexico early childhood leaders.

The keynote session provided a substantive analysis of brain science in early childhood development through the work of Dr. Patricia Kuhl, a researcher at the University of Washington studying the benefits of bilingualism on the brain. Dr. Kuhl was followed by a series of dynamic panels focused on tools to apply brain science in early childhood settings; the essential lens of equity and understanding systemic racism in policy change; and indigenous approaches to learning and parent engagement, including through systems like Head Start.

A vibrantly diverse state with deep roots in community-based advocacy and programming, New Mexico is at the forefront of education advocacy: just this year, families and school districts across the state, represented by the New Mexico Center of Law and Poverty, won a landmark case against the state which found that the state was not providing sufficient education as required by the Constitution, particularly for low-income, Native American, ELL students, as well and students of color and students with disabilities (Yazzie/Martinez vs. New Mexico). As a result, a coalition has agreed upon a comprehensive platform to reform education across the state.

More details can be found at

<http://nmpovertylaw.org/graphic-yazzie-martinez-decision/>.

Dialogue throughout the convening demonstrated a strong desire among leaders in New Mexico to build on existing momentum to radically improve the lives of children and families. As the Yazzie/Martinez changes roll out, policymakers and practitioners in New Mexico seek to continue to serve the indigenous people native to their communities, while partnering with or learning from other organizations with an eye toward reducing poverty and scaling best practices. Ascend is committed to continuing to learn, partner, and provide resources and connections to organizations throughout the state as they explore approaches that put families on a path to opportunity and stability.

Themes

- Brain science lessons
- Multiculturalism & equity
- Workforce development & economic pathways
- Mental health & trauma-informed programming
- Policy & systems change