Engaging Your Board in Supporting Quality Early Care and Education

ECE, CCRRA, ECERS, CCAP – talk about alphabet soup! Early care and education is a complicated industry even for insiders. For board members unfamiliar with the field, the task of understanding and supporting your center’s work is all the more daunting.

√ **Start with the heart.** As with any nonprofit, it all begins with a desire to make a difference. Educate your board members on the critical importance of the early years of human development. Give a hands-on tour of your center’s classrooms, exploring the cognitive, physical, social and emotional components of various learning stations. Invite board members to participate in family event nights, staff meetings, and center activities. Encourage visits to the center during operating hours. Highlight opportunities to volunteer in the classroom so board members can see firsthand the heart of the center’s work.

√ **Explore the ripple effects.** In what ways does quality early care and education improve your community’s business climate? How does quality early care and education impact readiness for kindergarten? Learning later in life? Graduation rates? Welfare dependence? Full-time employment rates? While studies have shown that investments in early childhood education benefit our entire community, many remain unaware of these ripple effects. Educate your board. Quality care doesn’t just feel good, it does good.

√ **Put knowledge into action.** Show the board how a commitment to quality can be translated into your center’s practices through accreditation and quality ratings, Environmental Rating Scale assessments, implementation of curricula, professional development activities, and participation in quality rating systems. Reinforce the link between quality care and the financial, management and organizational capacity of your center. Emphasize measurable results for your center’s work.

√ **Go public.** While quality care and education should be the first priority for your center, don’t let it end there. Encourage board members to promote broader awareness of the needs and issues facing the early care and education field. Ask board members to help engage local businesses as partners in your work. Solicit board member help in calling legislators to discuss early care and education issues, funding and industry-wide standards.

The work of your board is critical for the long-term health and sustainability of your center. Helping board members see the impact of your center’s work – and engaging them in making a difference within the broader industry – makes their work all the more fulfilling.

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