

## **DAEYC 2020 Election Questions**

### **Submitted by Stephanie Barry, 21st RD Democratic Candidate**

1) What are your views on the needs of young children (birth to kindergarten) and what specific steps would you take to address these needs?

Children first and foremost need to be able to spend time with their parents especially right after birth. That is why I support expanding paid leave to all Delawareans. We have already seen the positive effects this has on our state employees, it is time to expand it. Beyond that time period though many parents need to return to work and must have childcare services for their children. These services must be more than just daycares as study after study has shown that early education is critical in the development of a child. We must continue to investigate the best path forward to bring Universal Pre-K to our children in an affordable and quality way.

2) What are your views on the ways in which we can close the education achievement gap with a particular focus on the early years?

Universal Pre-K must be the goal of those concerned with early years of child development. Years ago most places around the nation were not providing public kindergarten, but with years of pressure the opinions and policies quickly changed to the point where kindergarten is nearly a constant institution across the nation and the state of Delaware. Kindergarten has been shown to begin closing that achievement gap, but children are still coming into kindergarten with vastly different levels of education. Universal Pre-K will help to close that gap further by providing quality early childhood education for children and families that may not have been able to previously afford these programs.

3) What is the role of the state/city/ federal government to provide for programs that will be addressing the socio-emotional & mental health issues young children will experience in the coming weeks and months resulting from the disruption in their lives brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Delaware lacks the mental health infrastructure at all levels for adults, teenagers, or young children. Two pieces of legislation that were introduced in the last General Assembly but did not receive votes were HB 100 and HB 307 would help address this looming crisis. HB 100 would increase the mental health supports in our elementary schools and HB 307 would require insurance to cover a yearly mental health assessment as part of yearly physicals and wellness checks. These programs are not the end all be all, but would be a step in the right direction.

4) What steps would you take to attract, and retain quality educators in the early childhood education field?

When you talk to those that have left early childhood education it always boils down to one thing. Money. Those that join the field do so because they love the work, but often have to leave because of long hours and lower pay than could be had in similar fields. As a part of Universal

Pre-K adoption we must ensure that pay is increased for early childhood educators to levels more matching educators in our primary schools. Early Childhood educators are educators not babysitters and deserve to be treated and compensated like it.

5) As an elected official, what would be your top 4 priorities in the first 100 days in this position?

My top priority if elected will be to get to know the constituents of the 21st District as well as providing them the opportunity to directly know me. I also will have the challenge to learn about the top priorities of the Democratic House caucus and learn where my own passions and experience can best align with the caucus goals. To that end, I hope to begin work on legislation to eliminate the discriminatory youth and training wage, as well as step up efforts to raise the minimum wage. I also hope to work on whatever committees I can that will help decrease the cost of healthcare for all Delawareans as well as join in on the Behavioral Health Consortium to expand access to quality mental health services.

6) How would you improve the economy of your city, our State and/or our nation.

We need to raise the minimum wage, institute paid family leave, and institute universal pre-k. Each of these will have direct and indirect impacts on improving the economy of Delaware. The minimum wage is self explanatory, raising the wage will give more spending power to those at the lower end of our economy. Studies have shown that those making minimum or nearly minimum wage have expenses they are putting off due to lack of funds. Giving them more spending power will see the money immediately re-enter the economy and make us more robust.

Instituting paid family leave will allow us to attract professionals from across the nation looking to start their family, allow workers the ability to keep their jobs without choosing between their family and their career, and lead to more continuity at businesses as people won't leave the workforce to be parents.

Universal Pre-K will have similar effects to paid family leave. Giving parents the flexibility to rejoin the workforce instead of staying home to take care of their children. In addition it will lead to a better educated workforce in the long term as children who experience quality pre-k have been shown to have higher lifetime earnings.

Our economy flourishes when it's people flourish.