Early Child Development/Children’s Mental Health Toolkit: Sample Letters to the Editor for Alberta

The following two examples incorporate the framing research in Alberta, Canada, and elements of the core story into letters to the editor. These letters to the editor are written in support of a fictitious early childhood advocacy coalition. They provide examples of how to use the media to advance a new frame about early childhood development and related/relevant policies, and contain language that can be incorporated into your own writing on this topic.

To The Editor:

Every morning as I welcome our children into the school building, I realize that, as their principal, I am responsible not only to them, but also to Albertans as a whole, because our children’s success or failure affects us all. That’s a tall order, of course, and a humbling one. But it’s one that we take seriously as educators. [Value: Interdependence]

As a faculty, we have recently been studying some of the newest discoveries in neuroscience for insights into how we can create the optimal learning conditions for our students. We now know that the brain is a highly integrated organ, and that all its parts – cognitive, social, emotional, and physical – are linked. This brain architecture is developing before birth and continues through adulthood, with each developmental stage building on what comes before. [What’s Built: Brain Architecture, “Can’t Do One Without the Other”]

Our kindergarten teachers know this very well. They see our students at the beginning of their school careers and can easily tell which children have spent their earliest years in healthy environments, surrounded by a network of caring adults—and which children have not. Just like in a game of volleyball or tennis, where you serve and return a ball, interactions between young children and adults flow back and forth, with adults responding to children’s gestures, facial expressions and language. However, if a child is in a child care center with a high caregiver turnover, or with too many children to care for, this has negative consequences for the serve and return
process that is the basis for successful child development. [How Development Happens: “Serve and Return”]

When we ensure that all children get that strong foundation in the earliest years of life, later development will be much more successful. That’s why we support the Kids Come First coalition, which is working to ensure that all kids have access to high-quality early childhood programs. Help make the future bright for our children and our state by supporting this coalition.
To The Editor:

As a businessperson in the community, I realize how important the healthy development of our children is for our province. And I know that just like we have the ingenuity to develop new technologies and better ways of doing business, we can apply the same ingenuity to the business of raising up the next generation.

I read an article recently that said that neuroscientists are now affirming what we know instinctively: children develop best in an environment of positive relationships. According to the article, good relationships in early childhood actually strengthen the physical architecture of the brain, creating a strong base for everything that is to come in a child’s life. In the same way we build a house, our children’s brains are also being built from the ground up. [What Develops: Brain Architecture Simplifying Model]

The experiences they have as children lay the groundwork for their future success. But too many disruptions of those relationships through things like high turnover in a child care center, or frequent moves due to economic instability in a family, can harm children because they literally disrupt this building process. If this stress becomes serious enough, it can cause a toxic stress response in their brains, leading to lifelong problems with physical and mental health. [How development can be disrupted and stress can be buffered: Environment of Relationships, Toxic Stress]

Especially concerning is the unmet needs of some of our children so that they can function well in their families, schools and communities. Children’s mental health is like the levelness of a piece of furniture — and that levelness can depend on the furniture itself, the floor it’s on, or both. Many places have instituted effective programs that provide these children the attention they need from experts who understand levelness and stability. Our task is to bring such innovations to scale for all children and families in need. We know that a healthy society depends on providing healthy environments and positive relationships for ALL children in Alberta, and yet gaps in our programs prevent many children from getting what they need to thrive. We have the resources, knowledge and innovation to fill those gaps and make sure all children have opportunities for good outcomes. [Value: Ingenuity] That’s why I support the Kids Come First coalition. I hope you will, too.