October 10, 2018

The undersigned are deeply alarmed by the latest high-tech industry push to target young children: the growth of so-called online “preschools.”

Recognizing the estimated $70 billion a year “preschool market,” an increasing number of Silicon Valley companies with names like “K12 Inc.” and “CHALK” are selling families and policymakers the idea that kindergarten readiness can be transmitted through a screen.\(^1\)\(^2\) What these companies offer is not preschool, but a marketing scheme designed to sell a virtual facsimile of real preschool. By adopting online pre-k, states are selling out kids and families for the benefit of private industry.

All of our knowledge about human development demonstrates that children learn best through exploratory, creative play and relationships with caring adults. As the American Academy of Pediatrics notes, “Higher-order thinking skills and executive functions essential for school success, such as task persistence, impulse control, emotion regulation, and creative, flexible thinking, are best taught through unstructured and social (not digital) play.”\(^3\) By contrast, there is virtually no evidence showing that online preschool improves outcomes for kids.

Online pre-K may expose kids and families to new types of risks. Research shows that screen overuse puts young children at risk of behavior problems, sleep deprivation, delays in social emotional development, and obesity.\(^4\)\(^5\)\(^6\)\(^7\) Extended time on screens diminishes time spent on essential early learning experiences such as lap-reading, creative play, and other social forms of learning. Relational learning requires healthy interactions with adults, and online experiences falsely marketed as “preschool” sabotage the development of these essential relationships. Diminishing the role of early educators both deprives kids of crucial relationships and threatens needed investment in actual high-quality preschools. Children without access to quality pre-K (often the targets of these online programs) already face a higher risk of academic difficulty than their peers, and online pre-K threatens to expand, not close, that gap.

The growth of online preschool hasn’t happened in a vacuum. As more and more research shows the importance of quality pre-K education, there’s a push to make early learning more “academic” and achievement-based and less about social-emotional learning. At the same time, school budgets are being slashed, and educators are asked to do more with less. Ed-tech companies have taken advantage of these trends by marketing technology and machine learning as a more efficient way of teaching than “old-fashioned” hands-on, face-to-face, school experiences.
Moreover, these programs and their “curricula” raise the real possibility of data mining aimed at young children and their families. In this era of big data, predictive analytics, biased algorithms, and documented data harms, online preschool threatens our most vulnerable and disenfranchised communities. With “social impact” capital flooding the early learning sector, online preschool is part of a larger set of trends to further digitize and privatize public services.

As educators and advocates, we are alarmed at the adoption of online preschool across the United States. The state of Utah, citing the need to serve families in remote areas without spending much money, sponsored the first state-funded online program of this kind, called UPSTART, and thousands of families have enrolled.⁸ Alarmingly, UPSTART has expanded pilot programs to at least seven other states.

Virtual preschool may save states money, but it’s at the expense of children and families. Early learning is not a product. It is a process of social and relational interactions that are fundamental to children’s later development.⁹,¹⁰ Asserting that this process can take place online, without human contact, falsely implies that the needs of children and families can be met with inexpensive, screen-based alternatives.

All children deserve high quality early education, and we call on local, state, and federal agencies and policymakers to reject online preschools and invest in fully-funded, relationship-based, universal pre-kindergarten programs with proven long-term benefits.

---

Signatories

Organizations

* indicates sign on after October 10 publication date

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood
Defending the Early Years
Badass Teachers Association, Inc. Board of Directors
Berkeley Media Studies Group
Center for Digital Democracy
Centre for Child Honouring
Class Size Matters
Common Sense Media
Educators for Peaceful Schools and Classrooms*
Electronic Privacy Information Center
First Up - Champions for Early Education
Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children
McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National Louis University
Network for Public Education
New Dream
Parents Across America
Parent Coalition for Student Privacy
Peace Educators Allied for Children Everywhere (P.E.A.C.E.)
The Progressive Education Network Board of Directors
Public Citizen
The Story of Stuff
TRUCE (Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment)
Valley of the Sun Chapter Arizona AEYC*
**Individuals**

*Affiliations are for identification purposes only.*

**Janna Aldrich, M.Ed.,** Education Coordinator, Gorse Children's Center, Mount Holyoke College

**Joan Almon,** Co-founder, Alliance for Childhood; Co-author, *The Crisis in Early Education: A Research-Based Case for More Play and Less Pressure*

**Howard Baker,** President of the Council of Child Development Laboratory School Administrators

**Kori Bardige, MS.Ed.,** Early Childhood Consultant, Learning Circle Consulting

**Vicki Bartolini, Ph.D.,** Chair/Professor of Education, Wheaton College, MA

**Jennifer Bass, M.D.,** Pediatrician; Quality Lead, pediatric exercise and obesity; Director, Cystic Fibrosis Program, Northwest Permanente

**Criscillia Benford, Ph.D.,** Co-author "Sensory Metrics of Neuromechanical Trust"

**Cynthia M. Boyd, M.D., M.P.H.,** Professor of Medicine, Epidemiology, and Health Policy & Management John Hopkins University

**Georgia L. Bozeday, Ed.D.,** Adjunct Professor, Northeastern Illinois University

**Karen Brackett,** former Director, Skidmore Early Childhood Center

**Michael Brody M.D.,** former Chair of the Media Committee of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; Institute of Digital Media and Child Development, University of Maryland; author of *Seductive Screens: Children’s Media Past, Present and Future*

**Corinne Brownell,** Early Learning Project Specialist, The Research Institute, Western Oregon University

**Blakely Bundy, M.Ed.,** Co-director of Defending the Early Years; Executive Director Emeritus and Senior Advisor, The Alliance for Early Childhood

**Carol Burris, Ed.D.,** Teachers College, Columbia University; Executive Director, Network for Public Education

**Patricia Cantor, Ed.D.,** Professor of Early Childhood Education, Plymouth State University; co-author of *Techwise Infant and Toddler Teachers: Making Sense of Screen Media for Children Under 3*

**Sven Carlsson,** Director of Middle and Upper School Studies, Francis W. Parker School

**Nancy Carlsson-Paige,** Professor Emerita, Early Childhood Education, Lesley University; Senior Advisor, Defending the Early Years

**Raffi Cavoukian,** Singer, Author, Founder of Child Honouring

**Dr. Maureen Cheever,** Emeritus Member, Progressive Education Network Board of Directors

**Erika Christakis, M.Ed., M.P.H.,** Author, *The Importance of Being Little: What Young Children Really Need from Grown-ups*
Kathleen M. Clarke-Pearson, M.D. FAAP; Committee on Federal Government Affairs and Council on Media and Communications, American Academy of Pediatrics; Board Member, NC CHILD, "the VOICE for North Carolina’s children"

Sherry Cleary, Executive Director, New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute Office of Academic Affairs, City University of New York (CUNY); Co-Chair, New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council; Past President, New York State Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators

Sydney Gurewitz Clemens, former faculty member at Pacific Oaks College, author of The Sun’s Not Broken, A Cloud’s Just in the Way: On Child-Centered Teaching; Exchange Leadership Master Leader

Joe Clement, Author, Screen Schooled: Two Veteran Teachers Expose How Technology Overuse Is Making Our Kids Dumber

Anthony Cody, Vice President, Network for Public Education

Chris Collaros, Principal, Wickliffe Progressive Program

Theresa S. Collins, Board President, Progressive Education Network

Mary Cornish, Ph.D., Professor of Early Childhood Education, Plymouth State University, Co-author of Techwise Infant and Toddler Teachers: Making Sense of Screen Media for Children Under 3

William Crain, Professor of Psychology, The City College of New York

Karen Cristello, Director, Boston College Children's Center

Tracy Cutchlow, author, Zero to Five: 70 Essential Parenting Tips Based on Science

Richard E. Cytowic, M.D., M.F.A., Professor of Neurology, George Washington University; Author, Synesthesia

Gloria DeGaetano, Founder/Director Parent Coaching Institute; author, Parenting Well in a Media Age, Keeping Our Kids Human

Nina Dickerman, M.S., Work/Life Program Manager, Dana Farber Cancer Institute

Doreen Downs, Adelphi University

Victoria Dunckley, M.D., child psychiatrist, advisory board-member for Physicians for Safe Technology, and author, Reset Your Child’s Brain

Jean Ciborowski Fahey, Ph.D., author, Make Time for Reading: A Story Guide for Parents of Babies and Young Children

Beverly Falk, Professor/Director, Graduate Programs in Early Childhood Education, The City College of New York

Stephanie Feeney, Ph.D., Professor Emerita of Education, University of Hawaii

Jennifer Farrington, President and CEO, Chicago Children’s Museum
Dr. Marjorie Fields, Professor Emerita, Early Childhood Education, University of Alaska; Past President, National Association or Early Childhood Teacher Educators

Lisa B. Fiore, Ph.D., Professor; Director Child Homelessness Initiative, Lesley University; Executive Editor, Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, & Practice; co-founder & Co-Chair, Violence Against Women Initiative

Richard Freed, Ph.D., Author of Wired Child: Reclaiming Childhood in a Digital Age

Ayla Gavins, Principal, Mission Hill School, Boston, MA

Hanna Gebretensae, Ed.D., Director, Eliot-Pearson Children’s School, Department of Child Study & Human Development, Tufts University

Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Ph.D., Unidel H. Rodney Sharp Professor, School of Education and Departments of Psychology and Linguistics and Cognitive Science. University of Delaware; Author, Becoming Brilliant: What Science Tells us About Raising Successful Children

Wendy Gonsenhauser, M.A., Assistant Director, Wellesley College Child Study Center

Sheryl R. Gottwald, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, Assistant Clinical Professor, Board Certified Fluency Specialist, University of New Hampshire

Peter Gray, Research Professor of Psychology at Boston College; author of Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life

Marcy Guddemi, Ph.D., M.B.A.

Michelle Gunderson, Chair, Early Childhood committee, Chicago Teachers Union

Leonie Haimson, Executive Director, Class Size Matters; Co-chair, Parent Coalition for Student Privacy

Pamela Haines, Public Policy Director of First Up

Alice Hanscam*, Author and Parent Coach

Luis Hernandez, M.A., Early Childhood Education Specialist Training & Technical Assistance Services, Western Kentucky University

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Ph.D., Stanley and Debra Lefkowitz Faculty Fellow, Department of Psychology, Temple University; author, Becoming Brilliant: What Science Tells us About Raising Successful Children

Mindy Holohan, M.A., CFLE-P, Instructor, Department of Family Science, Western Michigan University

Laura Huerta Migus, Executive Director, Association of Children's Museums, Arlington, VA

Anneke Huyghebaert, M.Ed., Early Childhood Educator

Donna Jacobson, Executive Director, McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National Louis University

Denisha Jones, Ph.D., Director of Teacher Education and Assistant Professor, Trinity Washington University; Advisory Board Member, Defending the Early Years
Allen D. Kanner, Ph.D., Editor, Psychology and Consumer Culture

Joe Kelly*, Author, Dads and Daughters

Jane Lannak, Ph.D., Clinical Associate Professor & Director, Boston University Early Learning Center

Velma LaPoint, Ph.D., Professor, Child Development, Department of Human Development and Psychoeducational Studies, School of Education, Howard University

Diane Levin, Ph.D., Clinical Professor of Applied Human Development, Boston University's Wheelock College of Education; Co-founder, Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE) and Defending the Early Years; Author, Beyond Remote-Controlled Childhood, So Sexy So Soon, Teaching Young Children in Violent Times, and The War Play Dilemma

Susan Linn, Ed.D., Author, The Case for Make Believe: Saving Play in a Commercialized World; Founder, CCFC

Gillian Dowley McNamee, Ph.D., Professor, Director, Teacher Education, Graduate School in Child Development, Erikson Institute

Dr. Robert MacDougall, Professor of Communication and Media Studies, Curry College

Roxana Marachi, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Education, San José State University; Education Chair, San José Silicon Valley NAACP; EduResearcher

Ravisha Mathur, Chair/Associate Professor, Department of Child and Adolescent Development, Lurie College of Education, San Jose State University

Gail Mulpot, M.Ed., Associate Professor, Northern Virginia Community College, Loudoun Campus

Jean R. Nava, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner, Kaiser Pediatrics

Dipesh Navsaria, M.P.H., M.S.L.I.S., M.D.; Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health; Council on Early Childhood, American Academy of Pediatrics; Member, CCFC Board of Directors

Julie Nicholson, Ph.D., Author of Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Protective Factors in Young Children. (In Press October, 2018)

Kathryn O'Connor, Ph.D., Director, Connecticut College Children’s Center

Susan Ochshorn, M.S.Ed., Founder, ECE PolicyWorks; Author, Squandering America’s Future

Sharna Olfman, Ph.D., Professor, Psychology Department, Point Park University

Meghan Owenz, Ph.D., Assistant Teaching Professor, Penn State University, Berks; Author, Screen-Free Parenting

Sung-Joon Pai, Chief of Staff, Charlestown High School, Administrator-on-Assignment, Boston Public Schools

Sveta Aranha Pais, Parent Partnership Coordinator, Austin Montessori School
Sue Palmer, Author; Founder and Chair of Upstart Scotland

Dr. John Pecore, Emeritus Member, Progressive Education Network Board of Directors

Rae Pica, Author, *What If Everybody Understood Child Development?*

Lisa Ranfos, UNH Child Study and Development Center

Diane Ravitch, New York University

Chin Reyes, Ph.D., Research Scientist, The Edward Zigler Center in Child Development & Social Policy, Yale Child Study Center

Jim Robertson, Executive Director, Plowshares Education Development Center

Samah M. Saidi*, M.A., CCC-SLP, Speech Language Pathologist

Cindy Sage, M.A., Editor, *BioInitiative Reports*

Dr. Heather Schilling, Manchester University

Dr. Daniel Schwartz, Head of Blue Oak School

Candice Scott, M.S., 21st CCLC Project Director, The Research Institute

Joni Siani, M.Ed., Asst. Professor of Media and Communications, Manhattanville College; filmmaker, *Celing Your Soul*

Timothy D. Slekar, Ph.D., Dean, School of Education, Edgewood College

William Softky, Ph.D., Co-author of “Sensory Metrics of Neuromechanical Trust”

Michele Sola, Head of Manhattan Country School; Emeritus Member, Progressive Education Network Board of Directors

James St. Clair, kindergarten teacher and DEY National Advisory Board member

Rachael Stickland, Co-chair, Parent Coalition for Student Privacy

Sharon Elizabeth Suggs*, M.Ed., AMI Certified Montessori Primary Guide Austin, TX

Joanne Szamreta, Ph.D., Professor Emerita, Lesley University

Teri Tlan, Ed.D., J.D., Professor, Early Childhood Education, National Louis University

Jessica Tang, President, Boston Teachers Union, Local 66, AFT-MA, AFT, AFL-CIO

Jim Taylor, Ph.D., Author, *Raising Generation Tech: Preparing Your Children for a Media-fueled World*

Chris Thinnes, Middle School Head, Wesley School

Mary Ellen Towne, Director, Skidmore Early Childhood Center

Sherry Turkle, Ph.D., Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology, MIT; author, *Reclaiming Conversation.*

Mary Ucci, former Director, Wellesley College Child Study Center
Judith Van Hoorn, Ph.D., Professor of Emerita, University of the Pacific

Angelica Velazquez, Parent; Director, the Informal Family Child Care Project at the City University of New York; Member, Board of Directors, Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood

Laurel Parker West, Ph.D., GOOD+ Foundation; Member, CCFC Board of Directors

Professor Heidi Weiman*, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, School of Education, American Public University

Kathi Wineman, former Early Childhood Specialist, Alaska Department of Education

Dr. Debora B. Wisneski, John T. Langan Community Chair of Early Childhood Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Kavan Yee, Middle School Head, The Lowell School