



**NORTH CAROLINA
EARLY EDUCATION COALITION**



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Think Babies™ NC Alliance recognizes 2020 Outstanding Baby Advocates Award winners include state and local policymakers and community champions

Raleigh, NC – The Think Babies™ NC Alliance presented the 2020 Outstanding Baby Advocate Awards on February 24, 2020, at the Think Babies™ Think Tank and Celebration at the McKimmon Conference Center in Raleigh. The Awards recognized eight policymakers, statewide organizations, and community champions for their efforts to increase public awareness or promote programs and policies to make a difference for North Carolina’s youngest children, age 0-3, and their families.

“The 2020 Outstanding Baby Advocates have done big and bold things to make sure that babies are a top priority,” said Michele Rivest, Policy Director of the NC Early Education Coalition, the lead organization of the Think Babies™ NC Alliance. “We are honored to be partners in this work with them and continue to be inspired by their tireless commitment to working on behalf of infants, toddlers, and their families across the state.”

Through innovative policies and new initiatives, advocacy and public engagement strategies, and hands-on work with families, the Award recipients went above and beyond to make sure all babies have what they need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and access to high-quality early education.

The 2020 Outstanding Baby Advocate Award Winners:

- Rep. Josh Dobson and Rep. MaryAnn Black, NC General Assembly
 - Recognized for their longtime commitment to young children, their support for the Think Babies™ NC Alliance’s policy priorities, and their bipartisan work on HB 882, a bill to support the early childhood education workforce, which was passed in a unanimous vote in the NC House of Representatives.
- Brenda Howerton, Durham County Commissioner
 - Recognized for her leadership in creating the statewide “100 Counties Helping Our Children Thrive” Initiative while President of the North Carolina Association of Counties, and for increasing local investment in early education in Durham County.
- Child Care Services Association
 - Recognized for the creation of the Infant-Toddler Educator AWARD\$ compensation program, the Babies First NC program, and their ongoing, groundbreaking research on the early education workforce in North Carolina.
- MomsRising
 - Recognized for their leadership in advocating for paid family and medical leave at the state and local level, which has resulted in thousands of families across North Carolina gaining access to paid leave.

- Cassandra Brooks, owner, Little Believers Academies
 - Recognized for her efforts to advocate for issues impacting young children, their families, and their educators, including closing the health insurance coverage gap, increasing access to child care assistance, and supporting the early education workforce.
- Crystal Kelly, Pritzker Children’s Initiative Fellow and Director of Strategic Initiatives, Watauga Children’s Council
 - Recognized for her leadership in Watauga County in the creation of several early childhood initiatives and community collaborations to support babies and their families, including Elevate Watauga, as well as for her efforts to secure additional funding for home visiting and early education teachers.
- Partnership for Children of Johnston County
 - Recognized for building a community advocacy network focused on babies and families in Johnston County, as well as for their efforts to implement family-friendly workplace policies in their own organization.
- Randolph Partnership for Children
 - Recognized for their community education and engagement work to raise public awareness of issues facing infants and toddlers and their families, as well as for their leadership on a variety of initiatives and strategies to support infants and toddlers in Randolph County.

More information about all of the winners and nominees for this year’s Awards can be found here: <https://www.nearlyeducationcoalition.org/events/outstanding-baby-advocate-award/>.

In addition to the 2020 Outstanding Baby Advocate Awards, the Think Babies™ Think Tank and Celebration also included a keynote address by Dr. Emily Hannon, a pediatrician in Wake County; a parent panel featuring three moms who shared their personal stories and experiences; and critical conversation workgroups focused on child health, family support, and early education to identify key strategies to improve outcomes for babies and their families.

The Think Babies™ NC Alliance seeks to advance policies, programs and budgets that support the healthy development of North Carolina’s babies and toddlers. It is aligned with the NC Early Childhood Action Plan and the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading initiative. It is led by the NC Early Education Coalition and a Leadership Team of state and local organizations focused on advancing public awareness and policy solutions for infants, toddlers, and their families. To learn more about the Think Babies™ NC Alliance, please visit: <https://www.nearlyeducationcoalition.org/think-babies-nc/>

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About the North Carolina Early Education Coalition

The North Carolina Early Education Coalition works to ensure that all children have access to high quality early care and learning experiences. Since 1990, the organization has highlighted the proven power of quality early childhood education by sharing information and resources with parents, professionals and policymakers. The NC Early Education Coalition is a proud partner in the national [ZERO TO THREE](#) Think Babies™ campaign and in the [Pritzker Children's Initiative's](#) National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers. For more information, please visit www.nearlyeducationcoalition.org, facebook.com/nearlyedcoalition or follow [@NCEarlyEdCo on Twitter](#).