

**What Every Long Islander Should Know:  
“Do Americans Hate Kids?”**

By Nancy Rauch Douzinas

You know those comparisons you always see: how American students do on tests, versus kids in other countries? Shocking, right? *What’s wrong with our schools*, we ask.

If you really want to be shocked, try comparing America to other countries on how we treat our children.

- The U.S. has the highest infant mortality of any G7 country.
- We have the highest rate of child abuse in the G7—three times that of the second-place nation.
- We push new mothers—as other nations do not—into returning to work, instead of staying with their babies at a critical time in their development. Only five countries on earth fail to guarantee paid leave for parents of newborns: Lesotho, Liberia, Swaziland, Papua New Guinea . . . and the USA. And we lag far behind in the support we offer new mothers.

Of course, I don’t believe Americans hate children.

But then why are we—as a nation—mistreating them so?

Partly we are unaware. We’ve just come through almost two years of pervasive political campaigning, and through all the talk and analysis we’ve heard barely a word about children’s needs. The so-called “national agenda” tilts too much toward “touchstone” issues, away from some of the most important ones.

It’s also true that America does not do well addressing long-term needs. We respond to crises pretty well—usually. But longstanding problems, not so much. Energy is a perfect example. For at least three decades we’ve

known that we need a national energy policy. We’ve known it, but we haven’t done it.

You could make the identical point about insuring our children. Or providing universal pre-K.

It’s not that we don’t know how important it is. We understand the far-reaching impact of early childhood development. Longitudinal studies have established that quality early childhood programs have lasting results, not only in educational outcomes, but all the way into adulthood, in the form of higher salaries and higher home ownership, less welfare and less crime. Such programs not only help kids, they strengthen our economy and society, paying for themselves many times over.

Modern science even explains why. Early experiences actually change children’s brains. A neuroscientist can look at pictures of two three-year olds’ brains, and tell you which one was played with and read to and which one was not. It is now clear as never before what families need for their children to develop properly.

Other nations have acted on this knowledge. They are racing ahead with comprehensive programs to give their kids what they need to succeed. Has the can-do spirit shifted away from us?

There will be no sudden disaster for us to react to. No forest fire to break out, or Wall Street crash. The disaster is here already, as day by day the lifeblood of our society, our future, streams silently away. We cannot remain successful as a nation, or great as a people, if we don’t do something about it.

*Nancy Rauch Douzinas is president of the Rauch Foundation, a Long Island-based family foundation. The “Long Island Index” provides data about the Long Island region, in order to promote informed public debate and sound policy making. For more information visit [www.longislandindex.org](http://www.longislandindex.org).*