



DANIEL FRIEDMAN

## Nadine Mathis Basha fights for Arizona's smallest citizens

**SHE WAS A KEY PLAYER** in the 2006 passage of Proposition 203, which uses the tax on tobacco sales to fund early childhood development and health programs. She chairs First Things First, the state board responsible for administering those funds.

But when it comes to understanding the needs of infants, toddlers and preschoolers, Nadine Mathis Basha has always been way ahead of her time.

Basha devoted her career to advocating for Arizona's smallest citizens long before experts provided solid evidence confirming the fact that paying attention to young children during the early years of life—and effecting public policy decisions to support their well-being—simply makes sense.

**Vicki:** Talk about what you're working on now.

**Nadine:** Well, First Things First has been huge. That is the initiative that was passed last November—an 87-cent sales tax on a pack of cigarettes—which has created a funding stream for early care and education. That is \$150 million dollars a year.

**Vicki:** You've been a teacher, owned a caregiver consulting business, started Children's Action Alliance. Did you always know you wanted to work in the education field?

**Nadine:** I was going to be a speech pathologist. But once I got in the classroom, I was hooked. In that process of teaching I realized that I knew a lot about classroom discipline, classroom management, reading methods—that kind of thing—but I didn't know anything about children. I became fascinated with childhood development. That is what led to my passion.

**Vicki:** What was your own school experience like?

**Nadine:** My father was a mining

engineer. We lived in many little obscure towns. The furthest east I ever lived was Iowa for nine months and the furthest south was actually Mexico. I started school in a one-room schoolhouse in Mexico with my brother and my sister and two other American kids.

**Vicki:** How did becoming a mom affect what you had learned about children?

**Nadine:** One of the more humbling things was that I really thought that I could have my two boys (Josh, 21, and Jeremy, 19) not be such stereotypical males. We worked on that, but I'll tell you what, you have boys and you have boy-boys, and I got boy-boys and there was nothing I could do on the nurture side to change the nature side of that! My husband has always laughed at me for that!

**Vicki:** You're married to Eddie Basha, whose family founded Bashas' supermarkets. When and how did you meet?

**Nadine:** I met Eddie in 1971, when I started teaching in Chandler and he was on the school board. We have both been passionate about education all of these years. When I married Eddie, I had a company of my own: Summa Associates. We did employer-supported childcare and elder care programs. I loved doing that.

**Vicki:** We hear the word "readiness" kicked around a lot. Can you tell us in a nutshell, what is readiness? What does that really mean?

**Nadine:** Readiness really starts with social and emotional readiness. Some children aren't ready to be separated from families. And you know what? That is okay. I have one who still does not want to leave home and he is 21, and really is happy living at home. I have another one, a 19-year-old,

who tells me that he never wants to live at home again.

**Vicki:** Here is an imaginary headline, "Nadine Basha Uses Magic Wand to Make Sweeping Changes for Children." What does the story that follows say?

**Nadine:** That every single child has the opportunity to have high quality early childhood experiences. That doesn't mean that every child memorizes their ABCs and can count. It is much more intricate and complex than that. I would just want to encourage parents to know that it is not about the toys, it is not all about those commercial products. It is really about having [children] develop their brains so that they can take something that they know and apply it in new ways.

**Vicki:** You've seen so many changes in the research and policies concerning early childhood education. What's one thing that remains true about what kids really need?

**Nadine:** Attention from people they

love. That is really what they want. They want your time. It is a ready lap, open arms and that kind of love that children truly need and want. **RAK**

*Vicki Louk Balint, of Phoenix, is the mother of Cory (26), Frankie (21), Robert (17) and Annie (16). Read her blog on our website or write to her at vicki@raisingarizonakids.com.*

### Learn more

Find information about First Things First at the Arizona Early Childhood Development & Health Board's website: [azecdh.gov](http://azecdh.gov).

Reprinted from the august 2008 issue of

**raising arizona kids**  
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is now on iTunes!

Find out more about Nadine's family, listen to her tips on choosing a preschool and learn how a bedtime story helped put the brakes on Eddie Basha's political career. Plus: Nadine shares her thoughts on No Child Left Behind and what role a newly elected president can play when it comes to education issues. Listen on [raisingarizonakids.com](http://raisingarizonakids.com) or [iTunes.com](https://itunes.apple.com).

Early childhood education advocate Nadine Mathis Basha in the First Things First office.