

Position

Generations United strongly supports engaging all generations in the education of our nation's children. As baby boomers age, our country will have a vast network of older adult family and community members who can be engaged as resources to help improve our educational system. Older adults can be involved directly in classrooms to assist with curriculum and instruction, serve as mentors for at-risk children, and even provide their professional and personal expertise to assist with classroom and community-wide needs. Most importantly, their involvement fosters a supportive community environment in the classroom which improves academic achievement. For the many grandparents and other relatives raising children, access to enrollment services and involvement in education is not only beneficial, but crucial to the child's success in the classroom.

Recommendation

Generations United recommends that Congress' reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) include language to:

1. Encourage schools to operate as "intergenerational shared sites" by housing services for children, youth, and older adults under one roof.
2. Support civic engagement opportunities for older adult family and community members in student curriculum.
3. Address obstacles that grandparents and other relatives raising children face in enrolling the children they care for in school.

Background

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, often referred to as ESEA or No Child Left Behind, is our nation's most comprehensive piece of federal education legislation. It authorizes education programs and federal funding that is administered in the states. Enacted in 1965, the current reauthorization of ESEA is No Child Left Behind of 2001. The upcoming reauthorization of ESEA presents an important opportunity to engage family and community members in the education of our nation's children through intergenerational approaches.

Benefits of Older Adult Involvement

When older adult family and community members are involved in school, there are benefits for all generations. Studies show that children in schools where older adults are a regular fixture have improved reading scores and fewer behavioral problems.¹ In addition, preschool children in intergenerational programs have higher personal/social development scores.² Older adults experience increased health and wellness from participating in intergenerational activities too. Older adults who volunteer with children burn more calories, are less reliant on canes, perform better on memory tests,³ and report more optimism than their peers.⁴

Barriers to Enrollment for Children

For the 2.5 million grandparents and other relatives raising children across the country, enrolling the children they care for in school can be a challenge. Many school policies are geared toward "nuclear" families. If the grandparent or relative stepped in to care for the child in a time of need, they may not have a formal legal tie to the child, such as guardianship or legal custody. They may also lack required documentation, such as birth certificates or school records, which can cause enrollment delays. In addition, these caregivers are often excluded from school activities or Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings that typically involve parents. ESEA can encourage schools to address these obstacles and ensure that children cared for by relative caregivers can enroll in school without delay.

Cost-effectiveness

In times where budgets are tight, intergenerational approaches save dollars while making sense. School-based shared sites save scarce resources by consolidating services for children, youth, and older adults under one roof. According to a study by Generations United, sharing a facility can decrease costs by reducing expenditures for items such as: administrative costs, overhead, and personnel.⁵ In addition, older adults represent our nation's best natural, untapped resource. Engaging older adults in the classroom is a cost-effective way to assist educators and schools in meeting the educational needs of children across this country, while simultaneously creating a community environment that fosters academic success.

Position

Generations United strongly supports increased investment and incentives at the federal level for high-quality early education programs. High-quality early education programs are an effective strategy to spur economic growth and improve educational achievement, college-readiness, and lifetime success. The upcoming reauthorization represents a unique opportunity to integrate early learning into school reform.

Recommendation

Generations United recommends that the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):

1. Offer flexible INCENTIVES to states that build on their commitments to invest in early education.
2. Provide a federal INVESTMENT in high-quality, voluntary pre-k that saves taxpayers dollars that would otherwise be spent on grade repetition, welfare payments, and prisons.
3. Ensure QUALITY by including pre-kindergarten teachers in professional development programs.

Research on Outcomes

High-quality early education is not only critical for our youngest learners, it is a smart investment as well. Children who participate in high-quality early education and pre-k programs have fewer referrals for remedial classes and special education and lower rates of teen pregnancy. They are more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college. In addition, studies have shown that children enrolled in high-quality pre-k programs enjoy higher lifetime earnings and employment rates.⁶ As these outcomes demonstrate, high-quality pre-k is a critical ingredient necessary to build the world-class workforce our country needs to compete in an increasingly global economy.

Cost-effectiveness

As decades of rigorous research proves, investing in high-quality, pre-k nets short- and long-term returns for taxpayers.⁷ For every dollar spent on high-quality pre-k, there is a return of up to \$7.⁸ With scarce resources, we can improve our economy by making smart investments in programs like pre-k that yield significant returns.

Seniors4Kids

Generations United's Seniors4Kids mobilizes older adults to advocate for increased access to early care and education for all three- and four-year-olds. Many adults age 50 and older are concerned about leaving the world a better place for future generations.

In a growing number of states, older adults are working to increase the availability and quality of early care and education through Generations United's Seniors4Kids. Some recent highlights of our work include:

- recruiting over 500 Captains4Kids as grassroots volunteers
- making over 4,000 direct contacts with state and federal legislators
- mobilizing high-profile individuals such as Kentucky's First Lady Jane Beshear and seven former first ladies as state honorary co-chairs
- convening awareness building events and campaigns
- publishing opinion editorials, letters to the editor, and articles highlighting older adult support for early education in *Aging Today*, *Albany Times Union*, *Ashland Daily Independent*, *The Asbury Park Press*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *The Courier Journal*, *Lexington Herald-Leader*, *Long Island Business News*, *Newsday*, *The New York Times*, *Los Nosostros*, *The Pittsburgh-Post Gazette*, *Syracuse Post Standard*, *The Times of Trenton*, and others.

¹ Rebok, G.W., et al. (March 2004). Short-Term Impact of Experience Corps® Participation on Children and Schools: Results from a Pilot Randomized Trial. *Journal of Urban Health* Vol 81, No. 1, p. 79-93.

² Rosebrook, V. (2006). *Research Indicates: Intergenerational Interactions Enhance Young Children's Personal/Social Skills*.

³ Fried, LB. et. Al (March 2004). A Social Model for Health Promotion for an Aging Population: Initial Evidence on the Experience Corps Model. *Journal of Urban Health* Vol 81, No. 1, p. 64-78.

⁴ Jarrott, S. & Bruno, K. (2001).

⁵ Jarrott, S., Schroeder, A. & Perkins, O. *Intergenerational Shared Sites: Saving Dollars While Making Sense* (Washington, DC: Generations United, 2008), p. 1-4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pre[k] Now. The Benefits of High Quality Pre-K. Accessed March 15, 2011 at <http://www.preknow.org/policy/factsheets/benefits.cfm>

⁸ Ibid.