

Seniors4Kids: School Reform Should Start Early

To provide all children with an equal opportunity to become college and career ready, Seniors4Kids recommends that the reauthorized 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

Overview:

All children need to enter elementary school prepared for success. The upcoming reauthorization of the nation's main education law, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), represents a unique opportunity to integrate early learning into school reform efforts. Older adults care about future generations and want pre-k in ESEA because it creates a capable, team-ready workforce for the future and nets taxpayers of all ages returns in the short- and long-term.

“Most seniors have grandchildren and want the best education for them. We have experience in asking for what we need from our government officials. Now, we are standing up for young children to ensure they are prepared for success in school and life.”

—Gladys Hardy, Linwood, New Jersey

Intergenerational Benefits: Successful Students, Responsible Adults, Strong Communities

As decades of rigorous research proves, investing in high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten nets short- and long-term returns for taxpayers. In the short term, quality pre-k helps reduce costly grade repetition and special education services right away. For example, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership saw a reduction in the percentage

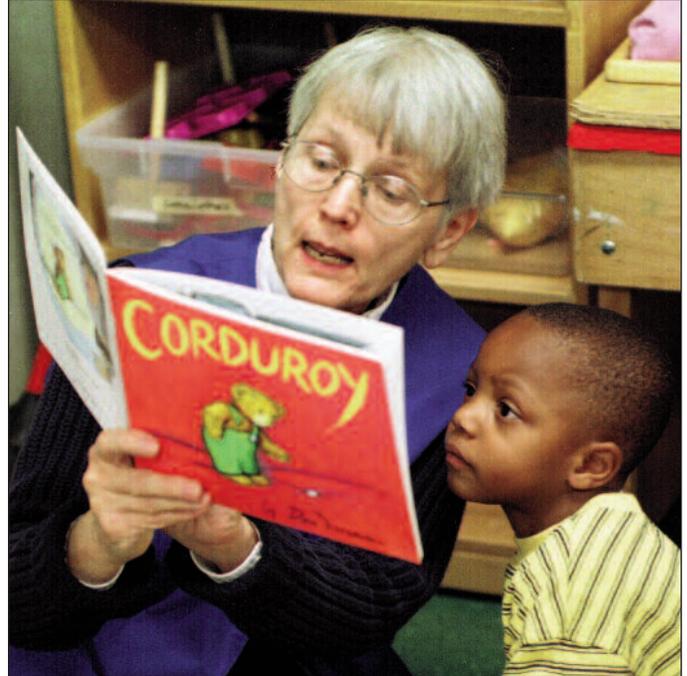


Photo Credit: L. Roger Turner.

of participating children with developmental delays (a predictor of special education needs) from 21% at entry to 8% at program graduation.ⁱ A study of New Jersey's Abbott Preschool Program found up to 50% less grade repetition for first graders who attended at both ages three and four.ⁱⁱ

Long-term intergenerational benefits of early childhood education that can save taxpayers up to \$7 for every dollar invested include:

- Greater academic motivation and higher high-school graduation rates, GED completion, and post- secondary enrollment
- Fewer referrals for remedial classes or special education
- Lower rates of teen pregnancy
- Reduced crime rates
- Better earnings and employment rates contributing to long-term fiscal balance ⁱⁱⁱ

Bi-Partisan Support in Tough Economy

Despite widespread fiscal distress, leaders of both parties in a majority of states support high-quality pre-kindergarten investments because of these intergenerational benefits. As

Congress considers the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a decade of bipartisan state efforts on pre-k provide an effective model for building political consensus around research-backed policies.

Nevertheless, only 25% of our nation's four-year-old children and 3% of three-year-olds can access high-quality, voluntary public pre-k programs.^{iv} With sustained federal support, state leaders can leverage their investments to build the effective, efficient, research-based education system our nation needs to compete in the global economy.

“The exclusive focus on K-12 in ESEA ignores the research on the critical importance of early learning. It’s time that we view quality, voluntary pre-k as an indispensable tool to build student achievement and combat high-school drop out rates so that America can compete in the global economy.”

– Robert Musgrave, Lexington, Kentucky

Older Adults Care about Early Education:

Given the slow pace of economic recovery, many seniors are very concerned for future generations. While 70% of older adults surveyed expressed satisfaction with their economic circumstances in a recent poll conducted by AARP, just 25% expressed confidence that future generations will be better off than theirs.

While recognizing the complexity of choosing between priorities when balancing budgets, many seniors understand and

embrace the value of quality early learning for all children. Through Generations United's Seniors4Kids, older adult volunteers are adding their voices to ensure a strong start to an education that will benefit all generations. “As a grandparent, I think children need diverse, mature voices to help them thrive. But I also recognize that quality pre-k benefits people of all ages and has a positive impact on issues that directly impact me: the economy, crime, national security, and revenue generation,” says Stephanie Freese of East Meadow, New York. With their support for expanding access to early education programs, older adults hope to position children and the nation for greater success.

Our Mission

Generations United's Seniors4Kids (www.seniors4kids.org) is a civic engagement initiative that highlights the role older adults play in support of issues that directly benefit children and youth. Currently, the program helps adults age 50+ in Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania to create statewide networks of community leaders and grassroots volunteers that work to increase the availability and quality of pre-kindergarten programs.

“Although the foundational skills for school and lifetime success are set in the earliest years, too often we fail to make smart investments early on to ensure the best outcomes. As a grandparent, it just seems like common sense to improve our education and workforce pipelines by starting school reform efforts with early education.”

– Melvin T. Johnson, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

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¹ Stephen J. Bagnato, Jen Salaway, and Hoi Suen, “Research Results of SPECS for Pre-K Counts: An Independent Authentic Program Evaluation Research Initiative 2005-2009 - Executive Summary,” Early Childhood Partnerships, University of Pittsburgh, 2009, <http://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/Library/SPECS%20for%20PKC%202009%20Final%20Research%20Report%20113009.pdf> (Accessed December 29, 2010)

² Ellen Frede et al., “The Apples Blossom: Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES) Preliminary Results Through 2nd Grade Interim Report,” National Institute for Early Education Research, 2009, http://nieer.org/pdf/apples_second_grade_results.pdf (Accessed December 29, 2010)

³ Pre-K Now, “The Benefits of High-Quality Pre-K,” <http://www.preknow.org/policy/factsheets/benefits.cfm> (Accessed December 29, 2010)

⁴ National Institute for Early Education Research, “The State of Preschool 2009,” <http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf> (Accessed December 29, 2010)

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Because we're stronger together[®]

Generations United (GU) is the national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. GU represents more than 100 national, state, and local organizations and individuals representing more than 70 million Americans. Since 1986, GU has served as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. GU acts as a catalyst for stimulating collaboration between aging, children, and youth organizations providing a forum to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation.

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