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Older Adults Speak Out in Favor of Early Childhood Education

New Report Demonstrates Benefits to PA from Quality Pre-K

HARRISBURG – Seniors rallied today in Harrisburg to show their support for early childhood education in the state. Generations United, along with their state partner Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children and in collaboration with *Coming of Age*, a national age 50+ civic engagement initiative based at the Center for Intergenerational Learning at Temple University, drew inspiration from the children’s book “The Little Engine That Could” to demonstrate the commitment of older adults to making sure that every child starts off on the right track.

“Older adults recognize from our own experience that a solid start in life and a good education are critically important,” said Yvonne Thompson-Friend, Pennsylvania State Coordinator for Generations United’s Seniors4Kids. “Because seniors are concerned about our nation’s future, we are dedicated to helping parents provide their children with the best opportunity to develop and learn.”

A highlight of today’s event, held in conjunction with Early Childhood Action Day and Older Americans Month, is the release of a new report, *Generations United for Quality Pre-K: Pennsylvania*. The report highlights bipartisan and public support for pre-kindergarten education, while pointing out enrollment gaps and long waiting lists for quality state programs. Although Pennsylvania has made significant progress in expanding access to quality early education programs through increased coordination, funding, and enrollment, only about 20 percent of the Commonwealth’s nearly 300,000 three- and four-year-olds attend public pre-k programs.

“In a challenging economy, expanding access to pre-kindergarten is vital for children and families struggling to make ends meet,” said Donna Butts, Executive Director of Generations United. “This report shows that investment in pre-kindergarten education reaps significant benefits for all Pennsylvanians and helps position Pennsylvania for greater economic success in the future.”

Generations United for Quality Pre-K: Pennsylvania highlights research that demonstrates children who attend pre-k perform better in school and require fewer special education and remedial services, saving taxpayer dollars. Children who participate in pre-kindergarten programs are more likely to finish high school, acquire higher-paying jobs, and become more productive citizens. Early childhood education programs are shown to produce a more capable workforce, promote long-term fiscal stability, and ensure Pennsylvania’s future economic competitiveness.

Within the next decade, older adults will make up almost 40 percent of Pennsylvania’s population. Contrary to popular perception, seniors support initiatives to improve children’s education, because they understand that this support makes a positive difference in their communities. They embrace the value of quality early learning for all children, while at the

same time recognizing the complexity of choosing between competing priorities when balancing budgets.

May is Older Americans Month, which centers this year on the theme, “Living Today for a Better Tomorrow” and highlights programs throughout the country that are helping older adults have better health as they age. Advocating for early childhood education not only helps children and society, but offer personal benefits for older adults as well. Studies link volunteerism with higher levels of self-reported health and physical performance, and lower levels of depression among seniors. One survey found that 75 percent of older adult volunteers viewed their volunteer activities as “very important” or “one of the most important” things in their lives.

“How exciting to have a passionate new voice on behalf of young children and pre-kindergarten education,” said Joan L. Benso, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. “We are thrilled that Generations United’s Seniors4Kids has become engaged in demonstrating the importance of investing in the early education of young children and we look forward to working alongside this dedicated group.”

For more information about older adult efforts to support quality early childhood education in Pennsylvania, see www.gu.org and www.seniors4kids.org.

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Generations United is a national, non-profit organization that works to improve the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all.

Seniors4Kids is a civic engagement initiative at Generations United that demonstrates the important role older adults can play in support of issues that directly benefit children and youth.