

Generations Unite for Quality Preschool: New Jersey



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May 2010

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We dedicate this report to every older adult in New Jersey who gives a voice to children who cannot speak or be seen on their own.

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Executive Summary

Older adults in New Jersey and throughout the United States support high-quality preschool programs because they care about children. But they also recognize that pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) education benefits all of society by yielding a more capable workforce and saving taxpayers money with short- and long-term benefits. By supporting the expansion of high-quality preschool programs, adults age 50 and older are making a lasting difference in the lives of children and helping to position New Jersey for greater economic success.¹

This report provides a summary of the intergenerational benefits of Pre-K and efforts to increase access and enrollment to preschool in New Jersey. It highlights New Jersey's impressive legislative accomplishments in securing quality preschool for low-income children, but also points to enrollment gaps for quality state programs. In addition, the report describes the growing population of older adults in New Jersey available to contribute to causes they care about deeply and the benefits for older adults that come from maintaining vital social connections in their communities. Older New Jerseyans are mobilizing to increase funding for and access to high-quality preschool for children in their communities based on previous successful efforts from across the country.

Investment in preschool expansion benefits all New Jerseyans. Children who attend high-quality Pre-K go on to perform better in school and require fewer special education and remedial services, saving taxpayer dollars in the long-term. Children who participate in high-quality Pre-K programs are more likely to finish high school, acquire higher-paying jobs, and become more productive citizens. Furthermore, they are less likely to commit crimes and become teen parents. As adults, they are more likely to be employed, earn higher wages, and contribute more in tax revenues. As a result, high-quality Pre-K programs produce a more capable workforce, promote long-term fiscal stability, and ensure New Jersey's future economic competitiveness.

Just over a decade ago, New Jersey emerged as a nationally recognized leader for providing high-quality preschool using a diverse delivery model that includes public schools, community-based child care centers, and Head Start programs. Currently, the state provides



“Unless state legislators keep the momentum moving forward, thousands of New Jersey three- and four-year-olds will lack access to early learning opportunities currently provided to preschoolers lucky enough to live in the state’s universal districts. How exciting to have New Jersey’s older adults, through their volunteer work with Seniors4Kids, demonstrate the importance of early education for all generations.”

–Cecilia Zalkind, Executive Director, Association for Children of New Jersey

for universal preschool in 35 school districts and provides targeted funds to low-income children in over 100 districts. Despite this progress, nearly 40 percent of New Jersey's three- and four-year-olds do not attend either private or public preschool programs. In the challenging economy last year, the state legislature provided no funding for expansion. Unless state legislators keep the momentum moving forward, thousands of New Jersey three- and four-year-olds will lack access to early learning opportunities currently provided to preschoolers lucky enough to live in the state's universal districts.

Lawmakers from both political parties in New Jersey support high-quality preschool programs and recognize the importance of preschool in stabilizing communities and achieving long-term fiscal stability. Even in the face of severe budget shortfalls, New Jersey should invest in programs that increase productivity, attract business, and help families. Investments in early education prepare New Jersey's future workforce for success in the global economy and addresses the immediate needs of families.

Older adult champions of preschool demonstrate this broad support. Contrary to popular perception, older adults support initiatives to improve children's education, knowing this support makes a difference in their communities. They are a growing resource for advocacy on behalf of the youngest New Jerseyans.

Stories from around the country demonstrate older adults' widespread support for children's education. In a growing number of states, older adults are working in visible ways to garner support for high-quality Pre-K through Generations United's Seniors4Kids initiative. Older adult volunteers, called Captains4Kids, mobilize grassroots support; contact public officials; and write opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and articles in support of high-quality preschool for all children. This kind of intergenerational civic engagement in pre-kindergarten education can strengthen families and communities for generations to come.

Preschool Greatly Benefits All New Jerseyans

In tough budget times, New Jersey should invest in programs that increase productivity, attract business, and help families. Few public policy options offer guaranteed returns as tangible as high-quality, voluntary Pre-K. Quality preschool programs generate jobs in New Jersey's local communities, with virtually none of the money spent on imported goods or services.

Decades of rigorous state and national research also demonstrate that these programs benefit all children academically and socially well into adulthood.² In New Jersey, for example, research confirms that Abbott preschool programs are producing significant learning gains with dramatic increases in test scores for children in language, literacy, and math. It also cut grade repetition by 50% and reduced the need for special education.³

Preschool also strengthens New Jersey's communities over time by building a more competitive future workforce and contributing to long-term fiscal stability. Every dollar invested in high-quality Pre-K can save taxpayers up to \$7 over the long-term in higher earnings, tax revenues, crime control, and other government savings.⁴ The intergenerational benefits of quality early education include:

Successful Students

- **Pre-k increases high school graduation rates.** Chicago children who attended a Pre-K program were 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school than peers who received no Pre-K education. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)
- **Pre-k helps children do better on standardized tests.** Michigan fourth-graders who attended Pre-K passed the state's literacy and math assessment tests at higher rates than peers who received no Pre-K education. (Source: "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Pre-Kindergarten," Yale University Child Study Center)
- **Pre-k reduces grade repetition.** New Jersey's Abbott districts cut grade repetition in half for first graders who attended preschool at ages three and four saving an estimated \$16,000 per student. (Source: "The Apples Blossom: Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES) Preliminary Results Through 2nd Grade Interim Report.")



"Early education decreases crime rates, increases the earning potential of graduates, and attracts qualified employees who are looking for good early-childhood programs. Immediate benefits also include reductions in grade repetition rates and special-education costs. As an older adult concerned with taxes, community services, and the future of my neighborhood, I ask if New Jersey can afford not to expand our preschool programs?"

– John A. Wanat, State Coordinator, New Jersey Seniors4Kids, Jackson



“I am never going to have a street or building named after me; but by trying to improve the education of the children in this state, this can be a lasting legacy for me and all of us.”

Donna Bailey
Captain4Kids

- **Pre-k reduces the number of children needing special education.** Among Chicago children, those who attended Pre-K required special education services 41% less than peers who did not attend. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)

Responsible Adults

- **Pre-k reduces crime and delinquency.** Chicago children who did not attend Pre-K were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than peers who attended high-quality Pre-K. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)
- **Pre-k lowers rates of teen pregnancy.** North Carolina children who attended Pre-K became teen parents less frequently than peers who did not attend Pre-K (26 percent vs. 45 percent). (Source: The Carolina Abecedarian Project)
- **Pre-k leads to greater employment and higher wages as adults.** Forty-year-old adults in Michigan who attended Pre-K as children were more likely to be employed and had 33 percent higher average incomes than peers who did not have Pre-K. (Source: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)

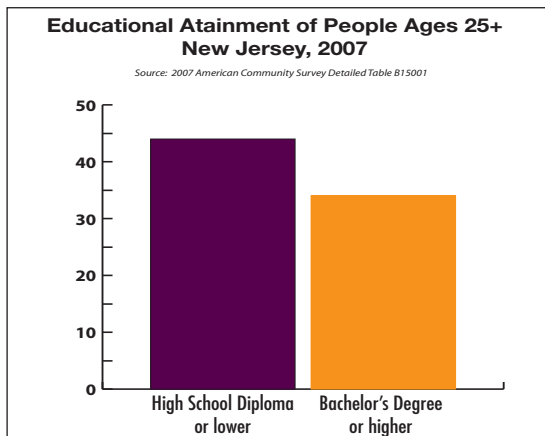


Photo credit: Donna Butts

Stronger Communities

- **Pre-k programs produce a more competitive workforce.** Investing in Pre-K to offset early disadvantages is an essential and cost effective means of building a capable workforce. “Over 20 percent of US workers are functionally illiterate and innumerate, a much higher percentage than in leading European countries,” wrote economists James Heckman and Dimitriy Masterov. They concluded, “This is a drag on U.S. competitiveness and a source of social problems,” including the huge costs of crime.⁵
- **Pre-k programs promote long-term fiscal stability.** High-quality Pre-K programs will have a significant positive impact on the nation’s fiscal balance and enhance the solvency of the Social Security system, according to economist Robert Lynch. The projected government-wide budget gain from high quality Pre-K would be .25 percent in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2050, about one fifth of the projected 1.27 percent of GDP deficit projected in the Social Security system for that year. “This contribution towards fiscal balance would start in less than two decades and would be achieved without raising taxes or cutting benefits for anyone.”⁶

Strong results like these can help ensure New Jersey’s future economic competitiveness. Many of the less-skilled jobs that went away in the recession are unlikely to return. High-quality preschool can position New Jersey to build the workforce it needs to put the state back on the path for growth.



Source: Tabulated from U.S. Census Bureau, *2007 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample*, (September 2008)

Efforts to Increase Access and Quality in New Jersey



“Pre-K is absolutely vital...I don't praise the state Supreme Court very often, but they mandated Pre-K and it paid off.”

—Governor Tom Kean, Star Ledger (July 20, 2009)

Just over a decade ago, New Jersey emerged as a national model for providing high-quality early childhood education to low-income children. These efforts are yielding real rewards, with research confirming that programs are producing significant learning gains for the state's children that are sustained into the elementary school years.⁷

In 1996, the state legislature passed and Governor Whitman signed into law the Comprehensive Education Improvement and Financing Act (CEIFA), providing preschool funding for half-day programs in 132 of the state's highest-poverty school districts through Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA). Through ECPA funding, these districts offer at least half-day preschool for 4-year-olds, operate full-day kindergarten, and improve services for children in Pre-K through third grade.

In 1998, New Jersey's Supreme Court ordered the state to provide a prescribed menu of supplemental programs addressing special needs of students in 31 of the state's highest poverty Abbott districts including voluntary universal preschool for all three- and four-year-olds, full-day kindergarten, and implementation of Whole School Reform models in Abbott elementary schools, health, and social services. As a result, New Jersey's Abbott preschool programs became an integral part of a broader elementary school reform strategy.⁸ Further Supreme Court rulings clarified that Abbott programs must employ qualified teachers with bachelors' degrees and P-3 teacher certifications, class sizes no larger than 15 students, and developmentally appropriate curriculums.

In 2004, New Jersey's established the Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) as part of the state's effort to provide access to high-quality preschool for all 4-year-olds. All non-Abbott school districts are encouraged to apply for funding, including districts already providing preschool that need additional funding to cover all income-eligible children. Districts receiving ECPA funding may apply for ELLI funds to improve program quality or extend the program hours to a full day. The level of ELLI funding is based on the number of low-income children to be served in the district and the length of the program day.

That same year, the state also met its deadline for all Abbott Pre-K teachers to have bachelors' degrees and P-3 certification. Much of what makes the Abbott preschool programs so successful today- whether they are housed in school classrooms, Head Start, or private day care centers- is that high-quality standards are the same across its diverse delivery model.

More recently, the state legislature approved plans in 2008 to increase voluntary universal preschool services to an additional 84 expansion districts as part of the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) and all at-risk children by 2013 serving an additional 30,000 youngsters across the state. But as the realities of the fiscal crisis hit New Jersey last year, the FY 2010 budget approved just one year after SFRA passed included virtually no funding bringing expansion plans to a halt for most school districts.⁹



Photo Credit: Andrea Tarr



“Legislators recognize Pre-K as the first step to improving K-12 education...They want a proven solution that helps children enter school prepared and Pre-K is that solution...Legislators understand that Pre-K is more than a children’s issue- it’s an important foundation for successful school systems and strong communities.”

**-Libby Doggett, Ph.D.
Deputy Director, Pew
Center on the States, The
Pew Charitable Trusts**

Preschool Expansion and New Jersey Families

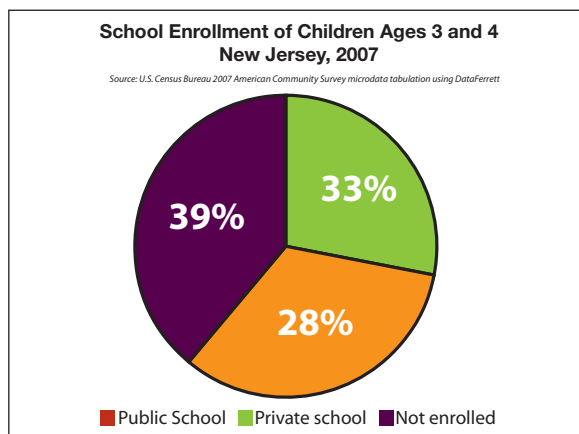


“Most seniors have grandchildren and want the best education for them. Seniors, in my opinion, have a strong voice. We have experience in asking for what we need from our government officials. Now, we are standing up for all of New Jersey’s young children to ensure that they are prepared for success in school and life.”

**–Gladys Hardy, New Jersey
Captain4Kids, Lindenwold**

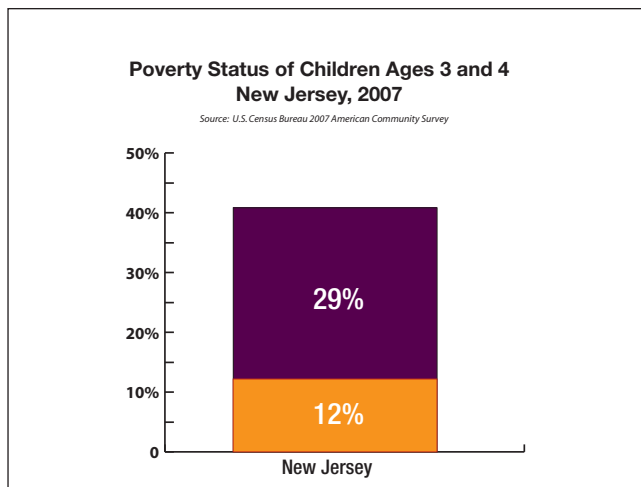
While New Jersey has made great strides in providing early education to its children, there is more work to do. Nearly 40 percent of New Jersey’s three- and four-year-olds do not attend either private or publicly funded preschool programs. Children in the state’s 560 non-Abbott school districts– which serve half of all low-income children in New Jersey– still largely lack access to early learning interventions which have proven so effective in the Abbott districts.¹⁰

As New Jersey faces the worst economy in a generation, even many middle class families find themselves struggling to afford quality early education and care. Between 1996 and 2006, while overall prices rose by about 30 percent, the costs of early education and care increased 60 percent. For many families, it ranks as one of the top two or three most costly household expenditures above food, healthcare, and even in-state college tuition.¹¹



Source: Tabulated from U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 *American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample*, (September 2008)

The School Finance Reform Act- if New Jersey can fund the law's implementation- can extend access to quality pre-k for low-income children throughout New Jersey, providing resources and learning opportunities for poor children outside Abbott districts. By giving more three- and four-year old children access to quality preschool programs, New Jersey's legislators can address the immediate needs of families and produce short- and long-term gains for the public.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 *American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample*, (September 2008)

Vital Civic Engagement of Older Adults for Preschool



“AARP’s issue surveys show concern for the quality of education and support for improvements. Older adults care about investments in children and are deeply concerned about the legacy they will leave their children and grandchildren. Generations United’s Seniors4Kids gives older adults a way to demonstrate this commitment.”

–John Rother, Director of Policy and Strategy, AARP

The number of adults age 50+ in New Jersey is on the rise. With older adults experiencing longer periods of healthy and active retirement or “encore” careers, their experience and skills represent a growing resource for New Jersey’s communities. Civic engagement offers adults 50+ opportunities to become more active in their communities, continue learning, and enjoy rewarding intergenerational experiences.

A recent survey of older adults indicates top reasons for volunteering include helping others, making a difference, and contributing to causes they care about deeply. Older adults are also concerned about leaving the world a better place for future generations.¹² Their support for quality early childhood programs helps to position children – and New Jersey – for greater success.

Older adults understand and embrace the value of quality early learning for all children. They also recognize the complexity of choosing between competing priorities when balancing budgets. Throughout the country, they have made and continue to make a difference for kids. In the late 1980s, Miami, Florida began a concerted effort to involve older adults in volunteering at schools. Several years later, thousands of these volunteers led a campaign to pass a billion-dollar education bond issue. Over 80 percent of the older population supported the successful measure, the largest increase in Miami’s history at the time. This support is all the more striking because a preponderance of these older adults’ grandchildren lived elsewhere.¹³ More recently, older Floridians voiced their support for high-quality, Pre-K education. In 2002, almost 60 percent of Florida voters approved a ballot initiative requiring high-quality, voluntary Pre-K be made available to all of Florida’s four-year olds by 2005.¹⁴

Older adults have championed children’s issues in other parts of the country. In Mesa, Arizona in 2005, residents in the retirement communities of Leisure World and Sun Lakes voted for higher property taxes and hundreds of millions of dollars in bond issues to support children’s education.¹⁵ In 2008 and 2009, national aging advocates AARP and the Alliance for Retired Americans held events and campaigns to raise awareness that investments in quality health care coverage for children yield high returns related to increased worker productivity and lower cost medical interventions later in life.¹⁶ These and other efforts led to the passage of significant federal legislation providing health care coverage for millions more children.

Older adults around the country understand that funding and support for quality education yield significant returns on investment for their families and communities. As part of Generations United's Seniors4Kids civic engagement initiative, older adults are mobilizing widespread bipartisan support to champion the cause of high-quality Pre-K. Highlights include:

- mobilizing high-profile honorary chairs in five states, including six former Florida governors and the widow of Florida Governor Lawton Chiles as honorary co-chairs of Seniors4Kids, who authored an editorial, "Universal Pre-K Needs Teachers with Degrees" published in all of the state's major papers
- recruiting nearly 500 Captains4Kids as grassroots volunteers
- making over 2,000 direct contacts with legislative officials
- conducting grassroots outreach at State Advocacy Days and national awareness building events and campaigns
- publishing opinion editorials, letters to the editor, and articles highlighting older adult support for improving the availability and quality of Pre-K in *Aging Today*, *The Asbury Park Press*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Courier Journal*, *Lexington Herald-Leader*, *Long Island Business News*, *Newsday*, *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The St. Petersburg Times*, and *The Times of Trenton*

New Jerseyans age 50 and older are now engaging in similar efforts to advance the cause of high-quality, accessible Pre-K for all children. With children unable to vote and many parents burdened with balancing work and family, older adult voters can mobilize their skills and experience to demonstrate that preschool enjoys broad public support around the state.

Advocating for high-quality Pre-K education not only helps children and society but can offer personal benefits for older adults as well. Volunteering promotes better physical and mental health, and more life satisfaction. Studies now link volunteering with higher levels of self-reported health and physical performance and lower levels of depression. A MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures survey found that 75 percent of older adult volunteers age 55 and older see volunteering as "very important" or "one of the most important" things in their lives.¹⁷

Conclusion



“A lot of people give lip service to building a future for our children, but now is the time to act for early education. Increasing access to quality preschool builds a foundation for lifetime success, improving our communities for people of all ages.”

**–Roberta Eisner, New Jersey
Captain4Kids, Matawan**

It is in the best interest of New Jerseyans of all ages that children receive a high-quality preschool experience. Rigorous national and state-specific research demonstrates that preschool provides children with a strong foundation for academic and lifetime success. Pre-K further benefits all of us by creating a more capable workforce that contributes more tax revenues and solvency for Social Security. Older adults care about preschool and are raising awareness about the programs, policies, and practices for children, families, and their communities. With wisdom, experience, and a strong desire to “give back,” older adults are marshaling bipartisan support for Pre-K and championing quality early childhood education. Their efforts are needed to ensure a sound start to an education that will benefit all generations. For additional information about Generations United’s Seniors4Kids or to get involved, visit www.seniors4kids.org.



Photo credit: Sarah P. Harmon

What is Seniors4Kids?

Generations United's Seniors4Kids (www.seniors4kids.org) is a civic engagement initiative that demonstrates the important role older adults can play in support of issues that directly benefit children and youth. Currently, we help adults age 50+ create statewide networks of community leaders and grassroots volunteers that work to increase access to and improve the quality of Pre-K programs. Seniors4Kids goals are to: increase public and political awareness of the powerful role adults play in youth advocacy; present an effective model for older adult engagement on behalf of children's issues; and provide inspiration and technical assistance for state and local organizations to implement effective programs connecting older adults, children, and youth.

Seniors4Kids is currently active in Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. The initiative started as a pilot program in Florida and operated previously in Ohio.



Photo credit: L. Roger Turner

About Generations United

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.

GU's Mission:

To improve the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all.

Vision:

A world that values and engages all generations.

Core Beliefs:

GU is the catalyst that brings single-age focused groups together to build and support a common agenda while providing a unique voice in public debate. GU honors, supports, and engages all ages. Further, we believe:

- Intergenerational collaboration will unite and improve our communities.
- Intergenerational approaches have a positive relationship to economic growth and value creation.
- Public policies should meet the needs of all generations.
- Resources are more wisely used when they connect the generations, rather than separate them.
- Discrimination in any form limits a person's potential to contribute to the development of his or her community.
- Grandparents and other adults who step forward to raise children are providing an economic service to families and the country.



Photo credit: Braden S.

Endnotes

- ¹ The terms preschool, pre-kindergarten, and Pre-K are all used by states to identify their early learning programs but can mean different things. For the purposes of this report, we use these terms interchangeably to refer to quality programs in New Jersey that provides three- and four-year-old children with the skills necessary to succeed in kindergarten. Some of the key components of a quality system include: well-educated teachers, low teacher-child ratios, research-based curriculum aligned to K-12 standards, engaged families, and a focus on the whole child. See Pre-K Now. “ABCs of Pre-K.” Accessed May 11, 2010 at: <http://www.pre-know.org/resource/abc/highquality.cfm>.
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- ⁹ For examples of 10 school districts throughout the state who opted to begin expansion despite the lack of funding, see Donovan, Laura Fasbach (2010). Committed to Reform: Preschool Expansion Moves Forward Despite Financial Obstacles. Newark: Association for Children of New Jersey.

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- ¹⁰ See Mead. Education Reform Starts Early, pg1.
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