

# Generations Unite for Quality Pre-K: Pennsylvania



**generations  
united**

Because we're stronger together

May 2009

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*Seniors4Kids*

Anne Tria Wise  
*Intergenerational Engagement*  
*Manager*



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We dedicate this report to every older adult in Pennsylvania who gives a voice to children who cannot advocate for themselves.

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## Generations Unite for Quality Pre-K: Pennsylvania



Photo credit: Braden S

# Executive Summary

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Older adults in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and throughout the United States support high-quality pre-kindergarten (pre-k) programs. They recognize that pre-k education benefits all of society by contributing to a capable workforce and saving taxpayers money. By supporting pre-k programs, adults age 50 and older can make a lasting difference in the lives of children and help position Pennsylvania for greater economic success.

This report provides a summary of the intergenerational benefits of pre-k and efforts to increase access and enrollment in Pennsylvania. It highlights significant bipartisan support across the country from lawmakers who understand that investments in pre-k education yield significant returns, but also points to enrollment gaps and long waiting lists for quality state programs. In addition, the report describes the growing population of older adults in Pennsylvania 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 Pennsylvanians can mobilize to increase funding for and access to high-quality pre-k programs for children in their communities based on previous successful efforts from across the country.

Investment in pre-k education benefits all Pennsylvanians. 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 education programs produce a more capable workforce, promote long-term fiscal stability, and ensure Pennsylvania's future economic competitiveness.

In recent years, Pennsylvania has made significant progress in expanding access to quality early education programs through increased coordination, funding, and enrollment. Despite



*“Older adults who mobilize in support of young children’s services are deeply caring, resourceful, highly motivated, and committed to making a difference in the lives of others. We are very fortunate to have Generations United’s Seniors4Kids taking root in Pennsylvania. The values, vision, and day-to-day volunteer opportunities of this initiative are consistent with Pennsylvania’s history of widespread civic engagement of historic, nation-building consequence and provide us with an important tool for building stronger, more caring communities.”*

**Dr. Matthew Kaplan,  
Associate Professor  
Intergenerational Programs &  
Aging, Dept. of Agricultural  
and Extension Education,  
The Pennsylvania State  
University**

# Generations Unite for Quality Pre-K: Pennsylvania



*“I think older adults really understand the importance of quality education. They often have grandchildren for whom early childhood education is critical. Advocating for quality pre-k is close to their hearts. Having this skilled and passionate older generation speak on behalf of our youngest citizens is extremely important. It provides both a powerful model and an effective voice for creating positive change in our communities.”*

**Dick Goldberg**  
Director, *Coming of Age*, a Philadelphia-based, national 50+ civic engagement initiative that is a partnership of Temple University’s Center for Intergenerational Learning, WHYY Wider Horizons, the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and AARP Pennsylvania.

this progress, only about 20 percent of the Commonwealth’s nearly 300,000 three- and four-year-olds attend public pre-k programs. In the challenging economy, expanding access to pre-k is critical for children and families struggling to make ends meet. Studies show that pre-k stimulates Pennsylvania’s economy, provides jobs, and supports working parents.<sup>1</sup>

Pre-k education enjoys bipartisan and public support across the nation. Lawmakers from both political parties support high-quality pre-k programs and recognize the importance of pre-k in stabilizing communities and achieving long-term fiscal stability. Even in the face of severe budget shortfalls, political leaders must make public investments in pre-k programs to prepare a future workforce for success in the global economy.

Older adult champions of pre-k 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. In about a decade, older adults will constitute almost 40 percent of the population in Pennsylvania and can serve as a potent force for advocating on behalf of the youngest Pennsylvanians.

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 pre-k education for all children. This kind of intergenerational civic engagement in pre-k education can strengthen families and communities for generations to come.



Photo credit: L. Roger Turner

## Pre-k Greatly Benefits All Pennsylvanians

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Few public policy options offer guaranteed returns as tangible as high-quality, voluntary pre-k. Decades of rigorous research demonstrate that these programs benefit all children academically and socially well into adulthood.<sup>2</sup> In Pennsylvania, for example, children in Allegheny County's Early Childhood Initiative (ECI), a high-quality pre-k program targeting at-risk children in eight low-income neighborhoods, demonstrated increased social skills, self-control behaviors, and significant decreases in problem behaviors.<sup>3</sup> Pre-k also strengthens communities 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.<sup>4</sup> In Pennsylvania, taxpayers could save over \$100 million alone in special education costs, recovering about \$1.68 for every dollar invested in pre-k programs.<sup>5</sup> The benefits of pre-k 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 .** Over 85 percent of Allegheny County's ECI children entered kindergarten without education support services, and 98 percent were promoted to first-grade. Only 2 percent of ECI children were retained in grade once they entered school, compared with 23% of non-ECI children in the same districts. (Source: "Quality Early Learning – Key to School Success: A First-Phase 3-Year Program Evaluation Research Report for Pittsburgh's Early Childhood Initiative (ECI)," The UCLID Center at the University of Pittsburgh)
- **Pre-k reduces the number of children needing special education.** Only 1 percent of ECI students were referred for special education services, compared with 21 percent of non-ECI children in the same school districts. (Source: Ibid)



*"My family has been fortunate in our ability to provide preschool for our children. But why should the availability of such programs be based, essentially, on an accident of birth? Our clear goal must be to lift all of our children (and yes, they are all our children!). With the support of good community-based early childhood education centers and schools, children respond in their social, intellectual, and emotional development. This growth spreads ripples throughout the community and improves things for everyone."*

**Elayne Bender**  
Executive Director  
East Mt. Airy Neighbors  
(EMAN), and Captain4Kids



*"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**

## 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 income than peers who did not have pre-k. (Source: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)



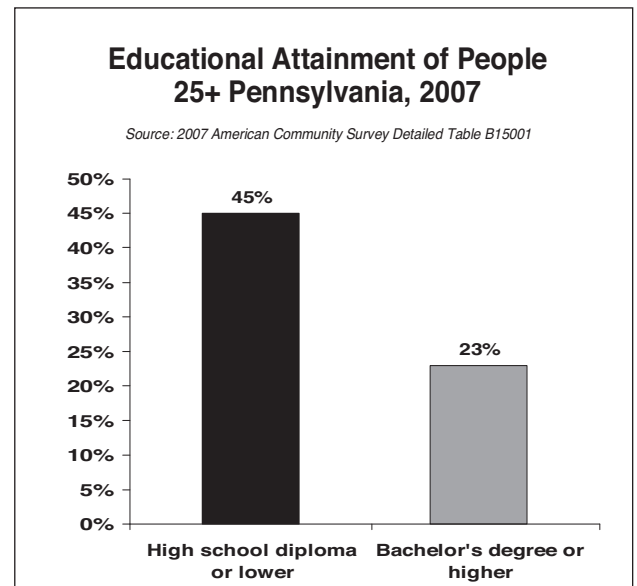
Photo credit: Susan P. Harmon

## Stronger Communities

- **Pre-k programs produce a more competitive workforce.** Investing in pre-kindergarten to offset early disadvantages is an essential and cost effective means of building a capable workforce. “Over 20 percent of U.S. 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.<sup>6</sup>
- **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.”<sup>7</sup>

For Pennsylvania, pre-k can also help ensure future economic competitiveness. One study estimates more than 75% of Pennsylvania’s jobs require workers with education beyond high school.<sup>8</sup> Yet less than 25% of adults age 25 and older earn Bachelors degrees.<sup>9</sup>

By reducing future expenses and boosting tax revenues from higher earnings obtained by more educated workers, pre-k investments help children and their families now while producing long-term gains for the public.



## Efforts to Increase Access and Quality in Pennsylvania



*“Older adults need to be champions for children. We cannot rely solely on the people and professionals who are in early childhood [programs] to carry the water. It is up to all of us to do our share and motivate others to do the same.”*

**Karen Snider**  
**President, Susquehanna**  
**Consulting and Financial**  
**Group, Inc.**  
**Secretary, Pennsylvania**  
**Department of Public Welfare,**  
**1991 to 1995**  
**Founding Member of the**  
**Children’s Cabinet**

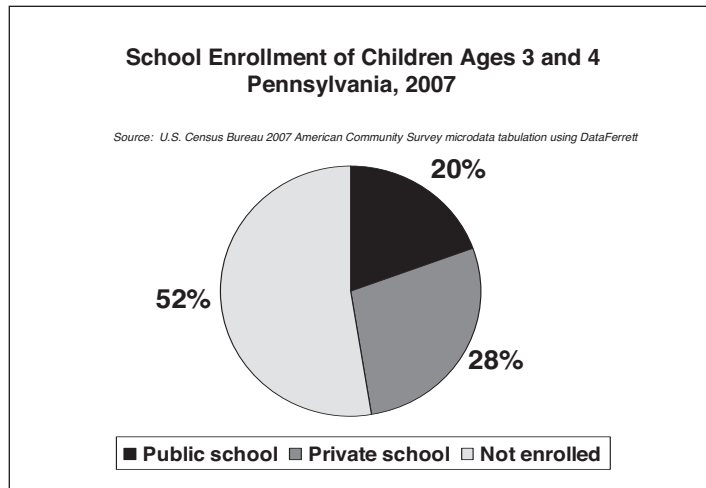
In just the past five years, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania significantly increased its funding for early childhood education and streamlined the administration of state programs to make high-quality pre-k available for more Pennsylvania children. Although school districts could previously use school funds to provide Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds (K4), designated state funding for pre-k did not exist prior to 2004. Starting in the 2004–2005 school year, the Pennsylvania General Assembly approved \$200 million for an Education Accountability Block Grant (EABG) allowing school districts to allocate their EABG funds for pre-k education, full-day kindergarten, and smaller class sizes for kindergarten through third grade. The state also invested \$15 million in the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) to increase enrollment and extend hours for Head Start, the federally-funded early childhood education program for low-income children ages 3 to 5.<sup>10</sup>

Besides dedicating state funding to pre-k, Pennsylvania also built a coordinated, system-wide approach to the development and implementation of child care and early education programs. In 2005, the state created the Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to promote statewide leadership, regional expertise, quality improvements, professional development for early childhood educators, and outreach to engage families and communities. The following year, the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) began coordinating the Department of Public Welfare’s child care, early intervention, and family support programs with the Department of Education’s early childhood and education programs. OCDEL also works in partnership with the Pennsylvania Keys to evaluate early learning programs through Keystone STARS, its quality rating system.<sup>11</sup>

In 2007, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts was established to expand access to high-quality pre-k for three- and four-year-olds at risk of education failure because they live in families whose incomes are below 300% of the poverty level, or they have language, cultural, or other special needs.<sup>12</sup> Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts provides grants through competitive awards to public schools, Head Start, and licensed child care centers or nursery schools with quality Keystone STARS ratings. Today, nearly 12,000 children are enrolled in the program. Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts is achieving impressive results. Ninety-four percent of participating children finished the 2007–2008 school year with age appropriate skills and behaviors, positioning them for success in kindergarten and beyond.<sup>13</sup>

## Pennsylvania Families and Pre-K

Pennsylvania now provides more than 60,000 three-and-four-year-olds with pre-k through Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, public school pre-k, and Head Start. Despite this progress, only 20% of Pennsylvania's three- and four-year-olds are enrolled in public pre-k education programs; and only 28% are enrolled in private pre-k programs, which are typically paid for by parents. At the start of the 2008-2009 school year, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts reported waiting lists of over 3,700 children.<sup>14</sup>



Expanding access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs is critical for Pennsylvania families and communities. Nearly 18 percent of Pennsylvania's three- and four-year-olds live below the poverty level (\$21,203 for a family of four), and approximately 37 percent live in families whose incomes are between 100 and 300 percent of the poverty level.<sup>15</sup> These children are at increased risk of failing in school and entering adulthood without vital skills needed to become productive workers and citizens.<sup>16</sup> In the midst of the economic crisis, more families are grappling with job losses and pay cuts. Even many middle class families find themselves struggling to afford quality pre-k and early care. One recent study estimates that early learning and childcare costs account for 30% or more of middle income family expenditures in Pennsylvania.<sup>17</sup>

# Generations Unite for Quality Pre-K: Pennsylvania

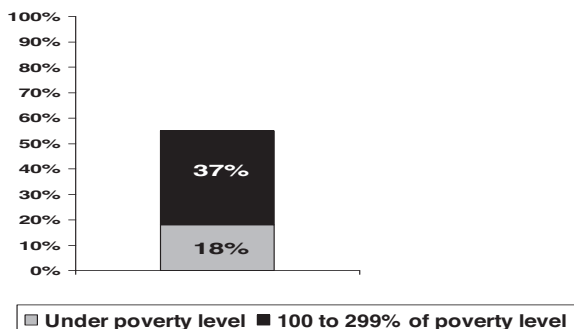


*“How exciting to have a passionate new voice on behalf of young children and pre-kindergarten education! We are thrilled that Seniors4Kids has become engaged in demonstrating the importance of investing in the early education of young children, and we look forward to working alongside this dedicated group.”*

**Joan L. Benso**  
**President and CEO of**  
**Pennsylvania Partnerships for**  
**Children**

## Poverty Status of Children Ages 3 and 4 Pennsylvania, 2007

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2007 American Community Survey microdata tabulation using DataFerrett



By ensuring that all three- and four-year-old children can access voluntary, high-quality pre-k, state legislators can address the immediate needs of families and produce long-term gains for the public. A recent Cornell University study determined that “increased direct spending on early childhood education programs generates more employment and total sales than spending increases in any other major sector in Pennsylvania.” In fact, Pennsylvania ranked the highest among states in terms of positive economic impact produced when states make public investments in early childhood education. For every additional dollar spent through Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and HSSAP for example, \$2.17 are circulated in the economy.<sup>18</sup> These economic trends are also acknowledged at the national level. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, more commonly known as the federal stimulus package, directs over \$2 billion to Head Start and Early Head Start programs in recognition of early childhood investment as a vehicle for economic stimulus.<sup>19</sup> Other ARRA funds can be used to support pre-k as well. Investments in pre-k and other early childhood programs employ people, encourage the purchase of goods and services, and keep parents in their jobs.

## Widespread National Bipartisan Support for Pre-k

Around the country, lawmakers from both political parties acknowledge the numerous benefits of early childhood education and support high-quality, accessible pre-k. The Conference of Mayors, the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more, released recommendations for reducing poverty and expanding America's middle class that named investing in high-quality pre-k as the top federal action step needed. The Mayors noted, the "potential economic upside to investments in early childhood education is also remarkable," after documenting the benefits of pre-k. "Purely in terms of improving the return on public investments, an expanded commitment in this area is probably one of the biggest opportunities this country has to invest in tomorrow's workforce."<sup>20</sup>

In 2009, the National Lieutenant Governors Association (NLGA) passed a resolution pledging support for expanding high-quality, state-funded pre-k programs. Co-authored by Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien (D-CO) and Lt. Gov. Jack Dalrymple (R-ND), the resolution further demonstrates growing bipartisan recognition of the importance of evidence-based policies such as pre-k education.<sup>21</sup>

Bipartisan support for pre-k is also clear when considering the political composition of state legislatures and the political affiliation of governors who support increased funding for high-quality pre-k programs. Among legislatures that increased funding for pre-k in fiscal year 2009, 19 held Democratic majorities, 8 held Republican majorities, and 5 contained split legislatures. Furthermore, 6 out of the 22 Republican governors and 8 of the 28 Democratic governors proposed increased funds for pre-k in fiscal year 2010, even in the midst of the current economic downturn.<sup>22</sup>

As Pennsylvania faces challenging economic times, identifying and securing reliable funding streams for high-quality pre-k programs requires creativity and perseverance. In states across the country, political leaders recognize the urgency and are finding the funds to make this important commitment to children. As a diverse and growing voter constituency across the Commonwealth, older adults can play an important role in encouraging public officials to make these needed investments in early education in times of economic hardship and prosperity.



*"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...Pre-k is changing the face of public education...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**

## Vital Civic Engagement of Older Adults for Pre-K

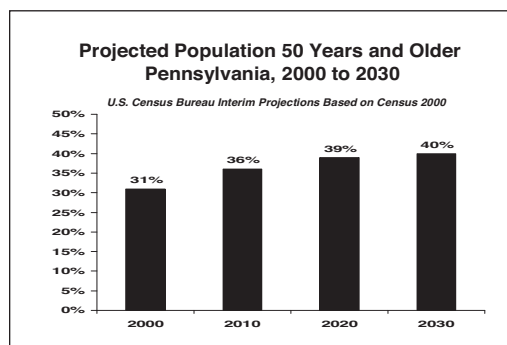


*“Seniors don’t just care about Social Security and Medicare. I joined the Seniors4Kids initiative because the wellbeing of our entire community matters to me. Our families need many community voices cheering them on to thrive.”*

**Deborah Turner**  
Captain4Kids

The number of age 50+ adults in Pennsylvania is on the rise. In just ten years, the U.S. Census Bureau projects nearly 40 percent of Pennsylvania’s population will be over the age of fifty.<sup>23</sup> With older adults experiencing longer periods of healthy and active retirement or “encore” careers, their experience and skills represent a growing resource for Pennsylvania’s communities.

Civic engagement offers 50+ adults 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.<sup>24</sup> Their support for quality early childhood programs can help position children – and Pennsylvania – 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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 early 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 paper
- recruiting almost 400 Captains4Kids as grassroots volunteers
- making over 1,000 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 Christian Science Monitor, The Courier Journal, Lexington Herald-Leader, Long Island Business News, Newsday, and the St. Petersburg Times

Pennsylvanians age 50 and older are now beginning to engage 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 pre-k 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.<sup>29</sup>



*"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**  
**and GU's Board Chair**

## Conclusion



*“As the leader of a non-profit working to improve the quality of early education care, I quickly learned the value of many voices amplified for children. It was a lesson I’d learned earlier in my role as senior staff in the Pennsylvania legislature. Now as the Pennsylvania State Coordinator for Seniors4Kids, I am excited to help to energize a new chorus of voices - older adults - in this effort to give our children the quality start they need and deserve.”*

**Yvonne Thompson-Friend**  
Seniors4Kids Pennsylvania  
State Coordinator

It is in the best interest of Pennsylvanians of all ages that children receive a high-quality pre-k experience. Rigorous research demonstrates that pre-k 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 pre-k and are raising awareness about the programs, policies, and practices for children, families, and their communities. With more available time, experience, and a strong desire to “give back,” older adults are mobilizing widespread bipartisan support and championing the cause for 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](http://www.seniors4kids.org).



Photo credit: Susan P. Harmon

# About Generations United

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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.

# What is Seniors4Kids?

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Generations United's Seniors4Kids ([www.seniors4kids.org](http://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 who 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: Pedro Centeno

## Endnotes

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