



Because we're stronger together

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March 18, 2011

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chair
HELP Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi
Ranking Member
HELP Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

Generations United and the undersigned organizations are grateful for your commitment to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and welcome the Committee's efforts to strengthen our nation's education system. We believe that older adults can be a tremendous resource to children and urge you to ensure that the reauthorization of ESEA contains the following:

- An investment in and incentives for high-quality early-childhood education
- Language to help facilitate the transition of more schools into intergenerational shared sites
- Assurances from local education agencies that they will develop and implement strategies to address education barriers facing children and youth in the primary care of a grandparent or other relatives
- Language to support intergenerational civic engagement opportunities in student curriculum

High-quality early childhood education

Decades of research demonstrates that high-quality pre-kindergarten programs are an effective strategy to improve education achievement, college-readiness, and lifetime success. Investment in pre-k helps children and nets short- and long-term returns for taxpayers of all ages. In the short term, quality pre-k helps reduce costly grade repetition and special education services right away. The long-term intergenerational benefits of voluntary, quality pre-k 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 fiscal balance

With 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.

Intergenerational Shared Sites

Faced with tough budgets, communities can save scarce resources by consolidating services for children, youth, and older adults under one roof. Our nation's schools are uniquely positioned to become intergenerational shared sites and engage older adults as resources for the education of our youth. We support legislation that will help schools transition into shared sites.

Research shows that shared sites provide substantial benefits for children:

- Preschool children involved in intergenerational programs had higher personal/social developmental scores (by 11 months) than preschool children involved in non-intergenerational programs.

- Children in schools where older adults were a regular fixture (volunteers working 15 hours per week) had improved reading scores and fewer behavioral problems than their peers at other schools.

Research also shows significant benefits for older adults who volunteer regularly with children. They burn 20% more calories per week, are more optimistic, experience fewer falls, are less reliant on canes, and perform better than peers on memory tests.

Grandfamilies and other relative caregiver support

Over the last 25 years, the number of children raised by someone other than a parent has increased dramatically, with grandparents providing care for the vast majority of these children. Many relative caregivers are raising children outside of the formal foster care system and without a legal relationship, such as legal custody or guardianship. Consequently, they can have greater difficulty accessing educational services than caregivers with a legal relationship.

We recommend including language in the ESEA that urges local education agencies to address educational barriers facing children and youth raised by grandparents or other relatives. Problems include excluding caregivers from Individual Education Plan processes and issues resulting from enrollment delays that are caused by:

- Immunization and medical records requirements
- Residency requirements
- Lack of birth certificates, school records, or other documentation
- Guardianship issues
- Uniform or dress code requirements

Intergenerational and civic engagement opportunities in student curriculum

Service-learning projects not only enhance students' learning experiences, they also address community needs, spur innovation in the classroom and improve student outcomes. In order to foster growth, the reauthorization of ESEA should include language which complements efforts in the Serve America Act to support the integration of intergenerational civic engagement opportunities in student curriculum. Studies show that youth who are involved in intergenerational mentoring programs demonstrate:

- improved grades
- significant decreases in school absences
- decreased suspensions from school

Intergenerational opportunities in schools allow for the community to come together and foster supportive and collaborative relationships to support student success both in and out of school.

In these challenging times, we must take steps to strengthen our schools and facilitate relationships between students, older adults, and their communities. If these recommendations are implemented, they will save limited resources today while investing wisely in ways that will provide multiple benefits for our children, families, and communities of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

AARP

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

National Center on Grandparents for Children's Rights

Easter Seals

National Association of Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Directors, Inc.

The National Association of Triads Inc.

Generations United

Grandfamilies of America

National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.

Volunteers of America

Gray Panthers

LeadingAge

National Council on Aging