



# GATEWAYS TO TWO GENERATIONS

THE POTENTIAL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND PARENTS TOGETHER

# WE ENVISION **AN AMERICA** WE ENVISION **IN WHICH A LEGACY OF ECONOMIC** **SECURITY AND EDUCATIONAL** **SUCCESS** PASSES FROM **ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT.**

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## OUR MISSION

Ascend at the Aspen Institute is the national hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move vulnerable children and their parents toward educational success and economic security.

## OUR WORK

Ascend takes a two-generation approach to our work — focusing on children and their parents together — and we bring a gender and racial equity lens to our analysis. We believe that education, economic supports, social capital, and health and well-being are the core elements that create an intergenerational cycle of opportunity.

As a new model of social innovation, Ascend at the Aspen Institute is engaged in three strategies:

- Elevating and investing in two-generation programs, policies, and community solutions;
- Building a network of diverse leaders through a national fellowship program and learning network; and
- Engaging the perspectives, strengths, and resilience of low-income families to inform programs and policies.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# **GATEWAYS TO TWO GENERATIONS**

**THE POTENTIAL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS  
TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND PARENTS TOGETHER**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Americans have always relied on a set of core beliefs that fall under the umbrella of “The American Dream.” Hard work. Equal opportunity. Optimism. However, many feel these values are in jeopardy; many parents have a growing unease about the future — their own futures and their children’s futures. Major shifts in family demographics and structure, as well as in the skills and education required by the economy, mandate a change in how we help families succeed.

Two-generation approaches, which focus on creating opportunities for and meeting the needs of vulnerable children and their parents together, move the whole family toward educational success and economic security. Ascend is the national hub for two-generation approaches.

In ***Gateways to Two Generations***, Ascend considers the question: Will two-generation approaches applied to the early childhood development arena produce better outcomes for both children and parents?

## THE ASCEND TWO-GENERATION FRAMEWORK

The two-generation framework draws on a history of efforts to address the needs of both children and parents while capitalizing on the implications of what science has demonstrated: the development of children and parents is inextricably linked. Parents gain motivation to succeed from their children, and vice versa; their efforts are mutually reinforcing. The two-generation

framework posits that when opportunities for children and parents are approached in tandem, the benefits may be greater than the sum of the separate parts.

The two-generation framework lays out three core components needed to address family vulnerabilities and make the American Dream for economic security and stability more viable:

- high-quality education for children and postsecondary education and skills training for parents;
- economic supports and asset building that provide a scaffold for families as they work to develop skills that lead to better jobs and long-term financial stability; and
- social capital and networks that build on the strength and resilience of families.

(Health and well-being is also part of the framework and will be explored further in additional publications.)

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN THE TWO-GENERATION FRAMEWORK

Early childhood development programs — such as home visiting, early intervention, child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, prekindergarten through third grade — are well positioned to be gateways to two-generation approaches that support children and their parents together.

Nearly 12.5 million children under age five are in some type of regular child care. High-quality early childhood development programs provide more than care and education for these children; they partner with parents and serve as a trusted resource. The emphasis on learning and development can provide an opening for parents to explore their own hopes for the future and increase their parenting skills and confidence, which can contribute to success in employment or continued education. These programs can be an important piece of broader efforts to create intentional linkages between child and adult services, and they can help realize the vision of two generations supported, learning, and thriving together.

## TOWARDS NEW THINKING ABOUT PARENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Current two-generation approaches build upon a long history of early childhood efforts and support for parents in those settings. They reflect a progression in thinking from a discreet focus on the parent, the provided service, and information dissemination to a more dynamic approach of engaging families that knits together child- and adult-focused services and prioritizes two-way communications and partnerships. The two-generation framework moves beyond traditional parent engagement for child outcomes; it attempts to bridge the efforts of early childhood with other systems, such as postsecondary education and workforce development that focus on parents in their role as breadwinners.

## TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

The case for investing in the core components of two-generation approaches is clear:

- **Education:** Parents' level of educational attainment is a strong predictor of children's educational and economic outcomes in the United States.
- **Economic supports:** Increased family income during early childhood can have a profound and long-lasting impact on children's lives.
- **Social capital:** Social capital — the network of people and institutions upon which a family can rely — is a critical contributor to the well-being of children and their parents.

**Gateways to Two Generations** explores each of the two-generation components in the context of early childhood development. Under each component are examples of promising approaches. These examples demonstrate the potential that early childhood development programs have to be gateways to two-generation approaches. Most involve partnerships; effective two-generation strategies are rarely achieved through a single organization's efforts.

## TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES AT THE STATE AND COMMUNITY LEVEL

Early childhood programs cannot be expected to address the needs of both children and families on their own. For many programs, the capacity to serve is out-matched by the needs of the families. They need a responsive infrastructure of support to provide quality services to children while partnering with adult-serving agencies. Partnerships can be encouraged through incentives at the federal, state, and local levels, including the promotion of statewide community planning efforts. Adaptive infrastructure and cohesive systems may be two of the most important factors to ensuring successful implementation and strong outcomes for both children and parents.

It is time to explore and promote the potential of early childhood development programs as gateways for two-generation approaches that support children and parents together. Research findings motivate the approach, innovative practices are generating results, and, as important, parents believe two-generation approaches are needed to increase their chances for achieving family educational success and economic security.

Change that moves children and their parents toward educational success and economic security is well within our grasp.

### Core Components of Two-Generation Approaches

**social capital**  
networks, friends, and neighbors

**education**  
early childhood  
postsecondary for parents

**economic supports**  
asset building  
housing



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*A major research finding is that the accident of birth is a primary source of inequality. Families play a powerful role in shaping adult outcomes, but it is not just through transmitting their genes. Parental resources, skills, and abilities matter greatly.*

— James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, White House press conference, 2011

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## INTRODUCTION

Americans have always relied on a set of core beliefs that fall under the umbrella of “The American Dream.” Hard work. Equal opportunity. Optimism. However, many feel these values are in jeopardy; many parents have a growing unease about the future — their own futures and their children’s futures. Nationally, major shifts in family demographics and structure, as well as in the skills and education required by the economy, mandate a change in how we help families succeed. For example:

- **Economic mobility:** Almost half of children under age six live in low-income families (\$44,700 for a family of four), and one in four are in poverty (\$22,050 for a family of four in 2012).<sup>1</sup> Black, American Indian, and Hispanic children make up a disproportionate

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*I am going to make it better. ... I am going to make her life better. I will do whatever I can.*

— From focus group with low-income, Latina mothers  
Denver, Colorado, 2013

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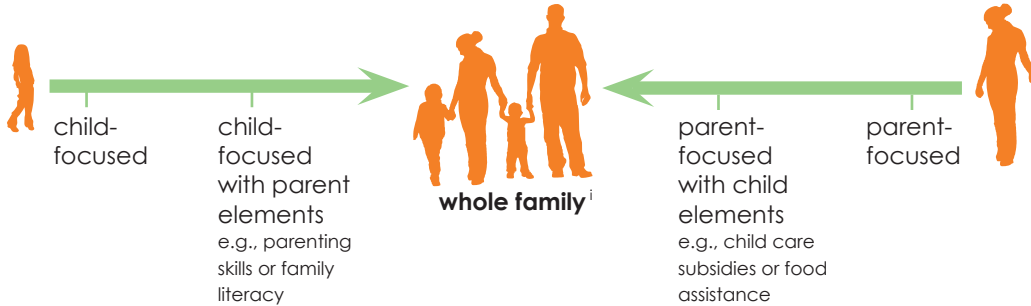


share of low-income children under age six; Hispanic children are the largest group of poor young children. Together, these groups represent 56 percent of children living in low-income families.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, once a child is born into the bottom income level, it is unlikely he or she will be able to move up.<sup>3</sup>

- **Education levels:** In 2011, 62 percent of children under 18 lived in a household in which the highest level of adult education was a high school diploma or less, and more than one-third of Hispanic children, 37 percent, live in families where the household head does not have a high school diploma.<sup>4</sup> Almost two-thirds of adults who never finished high school and one-third of those with just a high school diploma are low-income.<sup>5</sup>
- **21st century demographics:** Families in the United States are generating a wave of demographic shifts. By 2050, the Hispanic population will increase to nearly 30 percent of the total population, while the white population will drop to 47 percent and the African-American population will remain steady at 13 percent.<sup>6</sup> Currently, the Asian population is the fastest-growing population at 2.9 percent, with 60 percent of that growth resulting from immigration. Family structures have also changed: A higher percentage of U.S. children live in single-parent households, mostly headed by mothers, than do children in other major industrialized countries.<sup>7</sup> Twenty-nine percent of births to white women are outside of marriage, as are 53 percent and 73 percent for Latino and black women, respectively.<sup>8</sup> And conceptions of community are altered. Many families report only tenuous ties to neighbors and other traditional community networks, while, at the same time, they often live far from extended family members.

Promising opportunities do exist to move children and their parents toward educational success and economic security. Ascend at the Aspen Institute was founded to foster and amplify two-generation approaches in programs, policies, and systems to support children

Figure 1: The Two-Generation Continuum



and parents together. **Gateways to Two Generations** considers this question: Will two-generation approaches applied to the early childhood development arena produce better outcomes for both children and their parents? (See Figure 1.)

## THE ASCEND TWO-GENERATION FRAMEWORK

The Ascend two-generation framework is a lens for thinking about programs, policies, systems, and research. The framework draws on a history of efforts to address the needs of both children and parents while capitalizing on the implications of what science has demonstrated: The development of children and parents is inextricably linked.<sup>9</sup> Parents gain motivation to succeed from their children, and vice versa; their efforts are mutually reinforcing.<sup>10</sup> The two-generation framework posits that when opportunities for children and parents are addressed in tandem, the benefits may be greater than the sum of the separate, programmatic parts.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Within several disciplines (e.g., clinical psychology) the term “whole-family” has different meanings and uses. Ascend at the Aspen Institute uses the term to connote programs, policies, or systems that address the needs of both children and parents.

<sup>10</sup> The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child and the National Forum on Early Childhood Program Evaluation reviewed 40 years of evaluation findings to develop a framework for improving programs serving children and families. Together, they put forth a list of factors that have been shown to enhance early childhood development. These factors include:

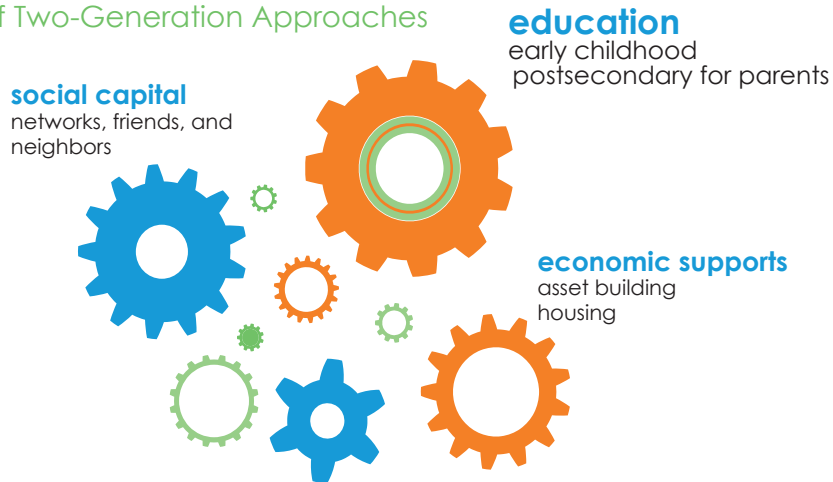
- For young children from families experiencing significant adversity, two-generation programs that simultaneously provide direct support for parents and high-quality, center-based care and education for children.
- For families living under the poverty level, work-based income supplements for working parents, which have been demonstrated to boost the achievement of some young children.

The two-generation framework lays out three core components needed to address family vulnerabilities and make the American Dream for economic security and stability more viable: high-quality education for children and postsecondary education and skills training for parents; economic supports and asset building that provide a scaffold for families as they work to develop skills that lead to better jobs and long-term financial stability; and social capital and networks that build on the strength and resilience of families (Figure 2).<sup>12</sup> The primary assumption is that when parents have access to the core components, they will be better able to support the healthy development of their young children, and, concurrently, when young children receive quality early childhood services, the parental benefits are manifold. Furthermore, when parents form strong relationships with their children and subsequently see them thriving, their pride may inspire them to work toward a better future themselves.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN THE TWO-GENERATION FRAMEWORK

Parent-child relationships are at the core of two-generation approaches. Early relationships with parents and other primary caregivers are the building blocks of healthy human development, which has been well-documented in neuroscience, molecular biology, genomics, epigenetics, and economics.<sup>13</sup> What young children learn from the adults who raise and care for them lays the foundation for future social, emotional, language, and cognitive growth.<sup>14</sup> When children do not have these protective relationships and experience deprivation and high stress levels that often

Figure 2: Core Components of Two-Generation Approaches



come with poverty, their brains and bodies adapt in ways that can have long-term negative effects.<sup>15</sup>

Early childhood development programs — such as home visiting, early intervention, child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, prekindergarten through third grade — are well positioned to be gateways to two-generation approaches that support children and parents together.<sup>iii</sup> Nearly 12.5 million children under age five are in some type of regular child care — including classrooms (at centers, schools, or Head Start/Early Head Start); family child care homes; the home of a family member, friend, or neighbor; or in the child's own home.<sup>16</sup> Almost two-thirds of children under age six have all available parents in the labor force.<sup>17</sup> Almost 40 percent of children under age two with working mothers spend at least 35 hours per week in nonparental care.<sup>18</sup> Home visiting programs — which promote children's development through in-home services — reached approximately 3 percent of infants and toddlers in 2010<sup>19</sup> but continue to expand their reach with new federal resources.<sup>20</sup>

High-quality early childhood development programs provide more than care and education for children; they partner with parents and serve as a trusted resource. The emphasis on learning and development

<sup>iii</sup> Other systems and services for children, such as the child welfare system, also hold great promise for new two-generation approaches. However, the focus of this paper is early childhood development, as defined above.

can provide an opening for parents to explore their own hopes for the future and increase their parenting skills and confidence, which can contribute to success in employment or continued education. Early childhood development programs can provide an inviting climate that facilitates social connections among adults as well as children, and they can act as a central point of contact or referral hub for available community services. These programs can be an important piece of broader efforts to create intentional linkages between child and adult services, and they can help realize the vision of two generations supported, learning, and thriving together.

## MOVING TOWARD NEW THINKING TO SUPPORT PARENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

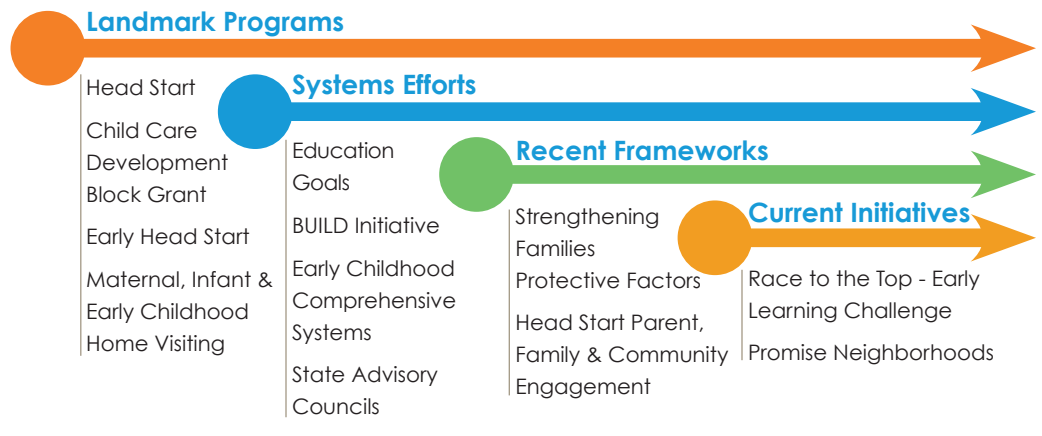
**A History of Engaging Parents in Early Childhood.** The two-generation framework builds upon a long history of early childhood efforts and support for parents in those settings. Current two-generation approaches reflect and have evolved from the philosophies, policies, and practices that have shaped the field.

The history of U.S. early childhood development thinking reflects a tension between support for working parents or a focus on child enrichment. During the Industrial Revolution “day nurseries” were placed in churches, factories, and private homes with the primary goal of providing safe care while parents worked.<sup>21</sup> Before the Great Depression, although efforts continued to emphasize safe care, some researchers and educators began to focus on the quality of care and education; the National Association for the Education of Young Children was established in 1926.<sup>22</sup> Public policy has reflected these tensions. Services have been seen either as a work support for parents (e.g., care to support working mothers during World War II) or as opportunities to promote the development of children (e.g., the 1950s nursery schools movement). Another complication has been historic ambivalence about apportioning public and private responsibilities in this arena. In 1965, Head Start was launched by President Lyndon B. Johnson as part of the War on Poverty. The emergence of Head



Start underscored the importance of parent engagement and family goals as elements of early childhood programs. While this was one of the first major national initiatives to embody a two-generation approach, many additional national programs have recognized the centrality of addressing children and families together. In addition, state and local system-building efforts and frameworks have helped define and refine the complexities of connecting the dots among existing programs and services necessary to support the whole family. The following timeline indicates some major milestones that have helped shape the early childhood field and the advancement of two-generation approaches (Figure 3).<sup>iv</sup> For additional information, see Appendix A.

Figure 3: Engaging Parents in Early Childhood Development, 1965 - Current<sup>iv</sup>



## TOWARD NEW THINKING ABOUT PARENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

In both program evaluation and basic science there is strong evidence that engaged and supportive families are a major contributor to positive child outcomes. This has generated a progression of thinking about parents in early childhood development programs (Figure 4). This progression entailed a move away from a discrete focus on the parent, the provided service, and information dissemination to a more dynamic approach of engaging families that knits together child- and adult-focused services and prioritizes two-way communications and partnerships. Although this thinking is not entirely new, the progression has evolved and been sharpened through a number of recent early childhood initiatives, including those mentioned above.<sup>23</sup> The Ascend two-generation approach aligns with these other influential frameworks and embodies this progression. The two-generation framework moves

beyond traditional parent engagement for child outcomes; it attempts to bridge the efforts of early childhood with other systems, such as postsecondary education and workforce development, that focus on parents in their role as breadwinners.

## TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

How are the two-generation framework components actualized in early childhood development programs? Below, each component — education, economic supports, and social capital — is defined and promising approaches are highlighted. Opportunities within health and well-being will be more fully addressed in future publications (see “What About Health?” below).



### WHAT ABOUT HEALTH?

Health and well-being has always been included in the two-generation framework. For example, home visiting programs and mental health (e.g., prevention of toxic stress) are currently considered within our social capital work. Other health efforts — access to health insurance (e.g., the Affordable Care Act) — are currently considered within our economic supports work. Ascend at the Aspen Institute is interested in a deeper exploration of health and well-being as an emerging component of two-generation approaches. Specifically, Ascend is interested in efforts that focus on two-generation approaches in mental health, access to health insurance, food assistance and nutrition, home visiting programs, and prevention of toxic stress and the amelioration of its effects. As the two-generation framework continues to evolve, this component will be explored more fully in additional publications.

<sup>iv</sup> In addition to the current initiatives mentioned, President Obama recently proposed expanded access to high-quality preschool for every child in America and a series of new investments in home visiting, Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care programs to establish a continuum of high-quality early learning for a child — beginning at birth and continuing to age five. At the time of press, Congress was preparing to vote on a budget that would include a \$1 billion increase in funding for some early care and learning programs.

Figure 4: The Progression of Thinking about Parents in Early Childhood Development

OLD THINK		NEW THINK
Serve child or parent	→	Serve two (or more) generations
Emphasize care or education	→	Emphasize care <i>and</i> education
Provide information to parents	→	Promote responsive parenting, family life and leadership skills
Require participation / responsibility of mothers	→	Assume partnership / responsibility include both mothers and fathers
Give referrals for services	→	Partner with agencies to provide access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• education</li> <li>• economic supports</li> <li>• social / mental health services</li> </ul>
Use data for compliance	→	Use data for continuous improvement

It is important to note that the programs highlighted involve partnerships with other organizations; effective two-generation approaches are rarely achieved through a single organization's efforts. The subsequent section highlights important local and state systems-level efforts. Ascend believes that when education, economic supports, and social capital are integrated and aligned in program implementation, families can achieve the greatest outcomes. Please see the Ascend at the Aspen Institute website ([ascend.aspeninstitute.org](http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org)) for many more innovative examples.

### EDUCATION

**Evidence of Impact:** Parents' level of educational attainment is a strong

predictor of children's educational and economic outcomes in the United States.<sup>24</sup> Maternal education in particular strongly predicts children's early developmental outcomes (Figure 5); advances in maternal education when children are young are particularly powerful for both children and mothers.<sup>25</sup> For example, a study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found that Mexican-born immigrant mothers of children in kindergarten through third grade who were simultaneously furthering their own education showed more involvement in their children's education.<sup>26</sup> Language skills of three-year-old children have been shown to increase as their mothers further their education; changes in maternal support of learning and the home environment explain some of the uptick.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 5: Mean Reading and Math Scores for the 2010-2011 Kindergarten Class by Parents' Highest Level of Education

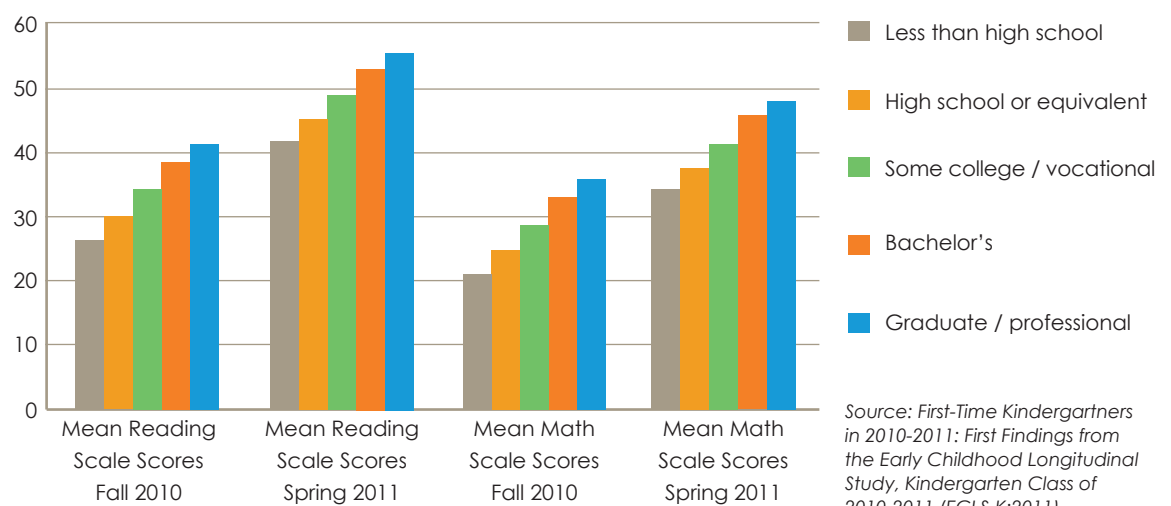
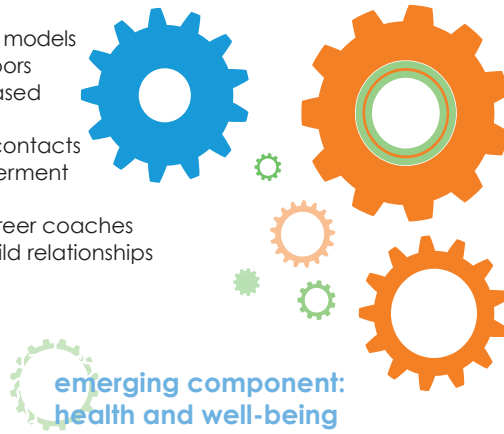


Figure 6: The Two-Generation Framework

**social capital**

- peer support & cohort models
- family, friends, neighbors
- community & faith-based organizations
- school & workplace contacts
- leadership & empowerment programs
- case managers & career coaches
- support for parent-child relationships
- mental health
- family life skills
- family engagement



**emerging component:  
health and well-being**

(illustrative examples)

- mental health supports
- preventing toxic stress
- access to health insurance
- support for parent-child relationships
- family planning

**education**

- postsecondary education & workforce development
- early intervention
- early childhood development programs (child care; Head Start; prekindergarten; home visiting; hubs of support for family, friend, and neighbor caregivers)
- K-12 education
- family literacy

**economic supports**

- housing
- transportation
- financial education & asset building
- tax credits
- child care subsidies
- student financial aid / Pell Grants
- access to health insurance / Medicaid
- food assistance / SNAP

Quality early education for young children has documented impacts on later educational attainment and economic outcomes. For vulnerable children, quality early education can produce an annual rate of return in the range of 7 to 10 percent, based on reduced costs in areas like health and criminal justice and better academic and workforce outcomes.<sup>28</sup> And positive experiences with their child's early learning environment can help motivate parents as they continue their own education. In turn, parent attitude toward education as a lifelong family value shapes children's drive in their own schooling.<sup>29</sup>

**Need:** Basic literacy as well as educational attainment remain challenges for many adults; this is a special vulnerability in families with young children. Fourteen percent of the adult labor force is functionally illiterate, and 20 percent is functionally innumerate.<sup>30</sup> Thirty million parents or primary caregivers of young children function at or below basic literacy levels.<sup>31</sup> Among immigrant families — which account for a full quarter of U.S. children — 26 percent of parents have less than a high school diploma, and 13 percent have less than a 9th grade education.<sup>32</sup>

**Promising Approaches:**

**Increase literacy skills for both children and parents.** The family literacy model is a

two-generation approach to learning that usually includes early childhood education, parent-child interactive literacy activities, parenting education, and adult literacy services. In Springdale, Arkansas — where 44 percent of K-12 students are classified as English language learners — a start-up grant from the Toyota Family Literacy Program in partnership with the National Center for Families Learning provides family literacy services at 13 sites for families with children in early childhood through grade nine. An additional partnership with a technical institute provides teachers for adult basic education that is tailored to students who are English language learners. Four days per week parents go to school for English as a second language classes, attend parent-directed information sessions, and spend time in the classroom with their child.<sup>33</sup>

**Provide student-parents early childhood and other supports.** A growing number of two- and four-year institutions have

*We see a two-generation strategy as part of the work. The lens is families and children. We're thinking about two-gen because children don't live outside the context of their families.*

— Carla Thompson, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, at the Aspen Institute Forum on Innovations in Early Childhood, 2013

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*I'm going to make sure that she is more ambitious than me. I'm going to make sure she hangs around the right kids and gets a network going in school and college.*

— From focus group with low-income, Latina mothers  
Los Angeles, California, 2011

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recognized that a segment of their students need help to manage school and family. Early childhood development programs can provide consultation, manage on-campus centers, or partner to provide care for the students' children. Nationally, a network of four-year colleges called the Higher Education Alliance for Resident Single Parent Programs offers housing and a range of other services to help single parents with young children attend school full time. In Kentucky, Berea College has on-campus apartments available for students with children. Campus supports include activities to support peer-to-peer networks and a state-of-the-art Child Development Laboratory for children of students 6 weeks through school age.<sup>34</sup>

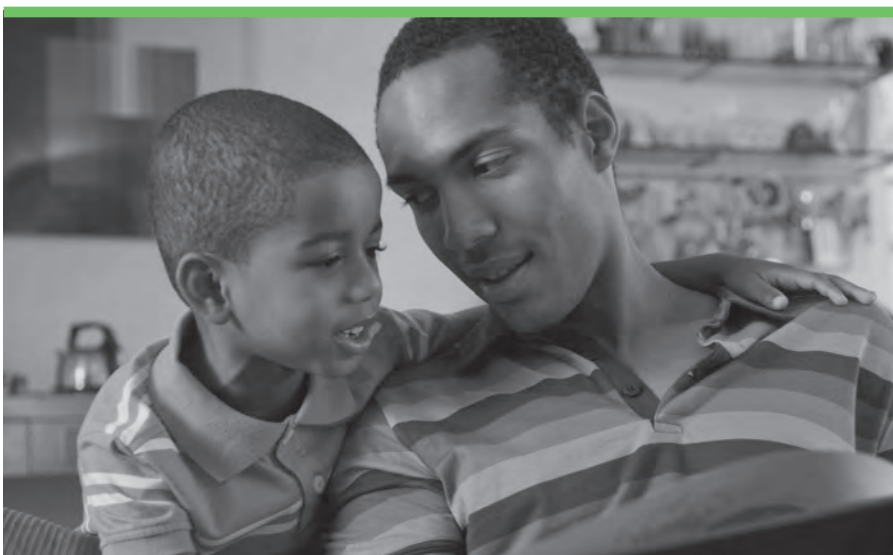
[Link early childhood development programs and higher education.](#)

Community Action Project of Tulsa County's (CAP Tulsa) CareerAdvance® program, established by Ascend Fellow Steven Dow, is piloting a pathway for the parents of Early Head Start and Head Start children to earn a variety of credentials or degrees in the healthcare field (e.g., nursing, health information technology). CareerAdvance® partners — Tulsa Technology Center, Tulsa

Community College, and Union Public Schools — provide education, starting with GED preparation, if needed. To promote peer support, the program enrolls students in cohorts; requires participation in weekly facilitated meetings; and purchases entire classes reserved for CareerAdvance® cohorts, which are scheduled for when the participants' children are attending Head Start or Early Head Start. CareerAdvance® coaches provide a variety of assistance to participants, including career planning and help with family issues and emergencies. Relationships with several local healthcare providers help facilitate employment. Importantly, a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Professional Opportunities Grant allows CAP Tulsa to provide services and supports at no cost to participants.<sup>35-36</sup>

[Raise the education levels and supports of the early childhood workforce.](#)

The child care workforce is primarily female and low income, and many child care workers are themselves mothers. In a recent sample of Head Start staff, 43 percent of teaching staff had at least one child under five years of age in the home, making the early childhood workforce a population that can benefit from two-generation strategies.<sup>37</sup> All Our Kin in New Haven and Bridgeport, Connecticut, improves education levels for low-income women while simultaneously enhancing the quality of family child care in low-income neighborhoods. Annually, approximately 40 family, friend, and neighbor caregivers, primarily Latino and African-American women, are recruited to gain professional credentials and obtain state licensure.<sup>38</sup> While becoming licensed, providers are encouraged to join All Our Kin's family child care network, which offers educational mentorship, professional development, and a network of relationships with other providers. Network members attend monthly meetings, workshops, and trainings (including Child Development Associate [CDA] trainings), and are eligible for postsecondary scholarships. The majority of All Our Kin graduates increased their incomes (exceeding the average New Haven industry wage by 10 percent), and approximately half completed either a CDA or associate's degree.<sup>39</sup>



## ECONOMIC SUPPORTS

**Evidence of Impact:** Increased family income during early childhood can have a profound and long-lasting impact on children's lives. For families with young children who have an annual income of \$25,000 or less, a \$3,000 increase during the years of early childhood yields a 17 percent increase in adult earnings for those children.<sup>40</sup> The strength of family income as a predictor of later child academic outcomes has risen at the same time that income inequality grown.<sup>41</sup> Beyond monthly income, accumulated financial assets are critical to help manage unexpected expenses and setbacks and can also impact the chances that children will attend college later.<sup>42</sup>

**Need:** A growing proportion of young children live in families stressed by food insecurity (22 percent), or household budgets disproportionately going to the cost of housing (40 percent).<sup>43</sup> Housing insecurity and frequent moves during the infant and toddler years have been linked to poorer child health and developmental

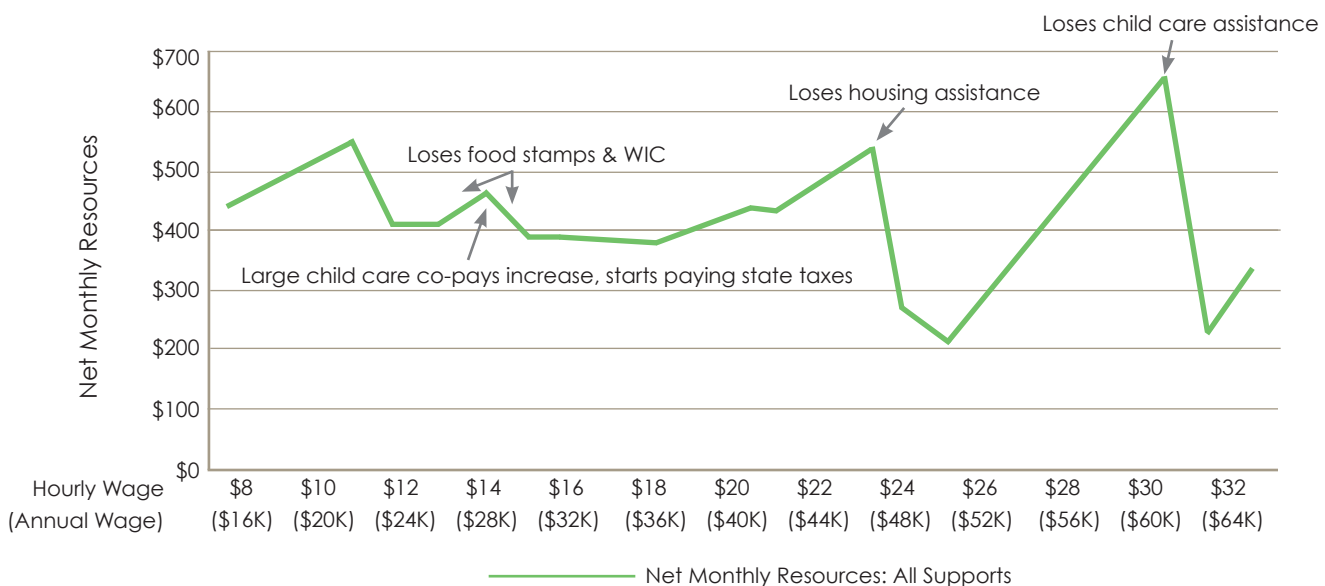
outcomes.<sup>44</sup> Child care assistance is a critical economic support without which low-income families struggle. Families who pay for care and live in poverty spend 28 percent of their income, about four times as much as higher-income families, on child care.<sup>45</sup> Since 2005, the recession also reduced savings that families could use to bridge gaps in family income or help children attend college, with black and Hispanic families the hardest hit.

### Promising Approaches:

**Build financial education and family assets.** Savings, especially in low-income families, is a good predictor of upward economic mobility for future generations. Organizations such as CFED, led by Ascend Fellow Andrea Levere, are helping to launch children's savings account (CSA) programs across the nation. At age 18, the money in CSAs is used for financing any form of postsecondary education. In partnership with CFED, the Colorado Department of Human Services, under the leadership of Ascend Fellow Reggie Bicha, will soon prototype one of the first statewide CSA programs, demonstrating

**The Cliff Effect:** Individuals who receive economic supports (e.g., housing assistance) may lose that assistance once they earn a wage increase that crosses an income threshold. This generates severe drops in total family resources for working families whose incomes rise just above the threshold for assistance – creating renewed struggles to pay monthly bills. The on-or-off nature of these supports can create strong incentives for families to keep earnings under the income threshold.

### Income Growth and Impact on Available Economic Supports



Crittenton Women's Union. (2009). "Combined Monthly Resources (earnings plus government work supports) [chart]." Retrieved from: [http://www.liveworkthrive.org/research\\_and\\_tools/reports\\_and\\_publications/The\\_Cliff\\_Effect\\_Experience\\_Voices\\_of\\_Women\\_on\\_the\\_Path\\_to\\_Economic\\_Independence](http://www.liveworkthrive.org/research_and_tools/reports_and_publications/The_Cliff_Effect_Experience_Voices_of_Women_on_the_Path_to_Economic_Independence).



that large-scale, state-run systems — such as state prekindergarten and child care assistance programs — can integrate and deliver CSAs to improve outcomes for both children and parents. Nationally, The ASSET (Assets, Savings, Support, Education, and Training) Initiative is a collaborative effort within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) agencies to integrate financial education and other services — individual development accounts, debt management, and tax-filing assistance — into existing programs, including Head Start.<sup>46</sup> CFED is working with ACF on the implementation of a partnership to help local grantees integrate asset-building products and services into their programs.

#### Protect family economic gains through continuity and bundling of supports.

Families making financial progress often lose economic supports well before they can become financially stable. Known as the “cliff effect” (see box), even a modest rise in family income can lead to a major net loss for families. Losing benefits like child care or other work supports often far exceeds wage increases.

Often several agencies come together to offer a “bundle” of services for vulnerable children and families. For example, the Atlanta Civic Site has created a seamless partnership with Sheltering Arms - Educare Atlanta, Dunbar Elementary School, and The Center for Working Families, Inc.<sup>47</sup>

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*When you want to help, you need to listen. Treat parents like they are the experts in their own lives.*

— Sandra S. Smith, University of California, Berkeley, at the Aspen Institute Forum on Innovations in Early Childhood, 2013

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The Center for Working Families provides education and workforce development services for parents and also has a contract with the Georgia Department of Human Services to finance the child care slots at Sheltering Arms. Sheltering Arms is a part of the Educare school network, which offers high-quality early childhood development and education for at-risk children from birth to five years living in poverty.<sup>48</sup> Sheltering Arms augments the state's child care funds with Early Head Start, Head Start, Georgia Pre-K, and other funding sources to offer full-day, year-round programming; provide comprehensive services (e.g., family support workers); and smooth over gaps in subsidy eligibility when possible.<sup>49</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation provides core funding for the Atlanta Civic Site.

#### Build education and social capital throughout housing transitions.

In 2010, more than one million school-age children started the school year without a stable home,<sup>50</sup> and half the children who spent time in homeless shelters were under the age of five. Black families, which represent 14 percent of all U.S. families with children, are disproportionately represented among homeless families with children; they constitute approximately 39 percent of all sheltered homeless families.<sup>51</sup> Early childhood programs as part of homeless services can provide both respite to parents and normalcy to the lives of children. Horizons for Homeless Children in Massachusetts partners with shelters across the state to offer on-site developmental play. In Boston shelters, the group also provides high-quality early education through three nationally accredited Community Children's Centers for children whose parents are participating in life and job skills training. The centers receive some support through public funds and child care vouchers, but the majority of funding is from private resources. The staff uses the Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning approach both in children's classrooms and in parent trainings to encourage parents' support of their children's social and emotional development. “Our homeless parents don't have a lot of control over their lives,” says Andrea Urbano, senior director of training and professional development at Horizons. “When they first start the program, we make a point to notice everything the parent

has done right in getting their child ready that morning, including dressing them in a sweater on a cold day. They need to know everything they do makes a difference for their child.”

## SOCIAL CAPITAL

**Evidence of Impact:** Social capital — the network of people and institutions upon which a family can rely — is a critical contributor to the well-being of children and their parents. Social capital can be generated within family relationships and through family engagement in schools, religious institutions, and other community networks. Higher levels of emotional support in mothers’ lives are linked with positive child outcome measures, such as better social competence and engagement in schooling,<sup>52</sup> whereas social isolation is associated with elevated rates of abuse and neglect.<sup>53</sup> Ascend Fellow Dr. Mario Small of the University of Chicago found early childhood programs that required or encouraged parents to participate in activities together led to opportunities for parents to form connections that often led to stronger long-term friendships.<sup>54</sup> For example, mothers using child care benefit from the advice of other mothers they encounter at sites; as a result, they can more effectively navigate hardships and more efficiently access resources such as economic supports.<sup>55</sup>

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*You don’t know what a parent is going through, so respect each parent as an individual and let them tell their own story.*

— Tameka Henry, mother and board member of the National Head Start Association, at the Aspen ThinkXChange, 2012

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Mother-child relationships are also an important piece of social capital, even before the child is born. The physical and mental health of the mother has an impact on child development, and expectant mothers who are more prepared and calm tend to have better birth outcomes.<sup>56</sup> Continuous emotional support provided to mothers during pregnancy, labor, and after birth is linked to better labor outcomes and enhanced mother-child bonding in the perinatal stage (e.g., better maternal sensitivity to the infant).<sup>57</sup>

**Need:** Currently, 11 percent of children (7.9 million) live in Census tracts with concentrated poverty (up from 9 percent in 2006).<sup>58</sup> Living in communities of concentrated poverty is associated with reduced maternal warmth and quality of home environment, and family poverty is associated with weaker social networks of support.<sup>59</sup> Low-income mothers suffer disproportionately from depression,<sup>60</sup> which can reduce the capacity of parents to cope and to form positive relationships and

## SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital is a critical component of the two-generation approach, and new research has begun to identify both the pathways and barriers to using social capital as a means of achieving economic mobility. According to Ascend Fellow Dr. Mario Small of the University of Chicago, social capital can be split into two distinct types: social capital on the broader level of American society and social capital at the level of the individual. Two-generation work focuses on the latter, a large part of which revolves around the resources one gains by being in a social network.

Information, social supports, and reinforcement of common norms are three critical areas where social capital can impact the individual. Each of these three areas can include bridging and bonding social capital mechanisms. According to Dr. Small, bonding social capital provides social support and norms reinforcement, or the connections to people who are like us. Bridging social capital provides access to information and resources from sources who are not part of our circle. While bonding social capital is considered good for maintenance of one’s current life, bridging social capital helps people move up the income ladder.

Dr. Sandra Smith of the University of California, Berkeley, has identified several barriers to social capital, including a distrust of social networks. An examination of persistent joblessness among low-income African-Americans revealed that more than 80 percent expressed distrust with their social networks. This led to a reluctance to help others in their job searches.

See, for example, Small, M.L. (2009). *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; and Smith, S.S. (2010). *Race and trust*. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36, 453-475.

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*AVANCE continues to grow alongside our families. We have learned over the past 40 years that to meet the needs of vulnerable families, and to do so with limited resources, AVANCE must partner and collaborate.*

— Rick Noriega, AVANCE, at the Aspen Institute Forum on Innovations in Early Childhood, 2013

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attachments to other people, including their children.<sup>61</sup>

**Promising Approaches:**

**Develop strong parent-child relationships early.** Doulas provide intensive emotional support to vulnerable first-time mothers through weekly home visits. HealthConnect One provides a community-based doula model currently used or in development in more than 100 communities nationally. Local communities select respected members of their community to receive extensive training in health promotion to provide relationship-driven support for expectant families. Another initiative, in place in Wisconsin's Rock and Walworth counties, integrates doulas into the Early Head Start program. They accompany mothers on prenatal visits, attend the birth, and continue to provide relationship-based support at least 12 months after the birth. They also encourage the involvement of family members and fathers in the

pregnancy, birth, and lives of the mothers and children.<sup>62</sup>

**Build family life skills.** Struggling to manage family life can be a major barrier to parents trying to achieve higher education and economic goals. Acelero Learning, co-founded by Ascend Fellow Henry Wilde, aims to strengthen the family environments of Head Start parents as part of the group's mission to close the achievement gap. Acelero strategically focuses on four family life practices that research suggests help promote school readiness: daily reading time, positive guidance and discipline, experience- and language-rich environments, and consistent family routines. Acelero Learning integrates this family life practice focus into all aspects of family engagement work, creating a program-wide environment that encourages families to support one another in these endeavors.<sup>63</sup>

**Support parent engagement in early childhood through social networks.** Several research-based models exist to build peer support into early childhood development programs. Abriendo Puertas is a parent training model designed by and for Latino parents with children ages 0-5. The curriculum, available in both Spanish and English, promotes school readiness, family well-being, and advocacy through best practices in areas such as early childhood development, civic engagement, and planning for family success. Many parents do not see themselves as important to their children's success in school, and building relationships with other parents helps them see the connection. "Some parents think that to be ready for kindergarten all you need is a new haircut, new clothes, and a lunch pail," says Sandra Gutierrez, Abriendo Puertas' national director. "But what children really need is to be ready socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively and have parents who are ready to be involved in their education."<sup>64</sup>

We have highlighted just a few models that illustrate how each component in Ascend's two-generation framework can connect to early childhood development. In practice, many models incorporate more than one component. For example, CAP Tulsa's program intentionally incorporates social capital and economic supports, as the





organization considers these components necessary for the attainment of education, career, and financial stability goals. Another innovative two-generation model, the Jeremiah Program, provides single mothers and their children with a safe, affordable place to live; quality early childhood education; life skills training; and support for career-track postsecondary education. Led by President and CEO and Ascend Fellow Gloria Perez, this program (with sites in Minneapolis and St. Paul in Minnesota; Fargo, North Dakota; and Austin, Texas) boasts great success: 100 percent of recent alumni have career-track employment at a livable wage (the average is more than \$17 per hour). The AVANCE Parent-Child Education Program (PCEP) provides educational opportunities for both parent and child, as well as economic supports, and aims to build the social capital and resilience of families. Many more examples of promising and emerging two-generation programs can be found on the Ascend at the Aspen Institute website ([ascend.aspeninstitute.org](http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org)).

## TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES AT THE STATE AND COMMUNITY LEVEL

Early childhood programs cannot be expected to address the needs of both children and families on their own. For many programs, the capacity to serve is out-matched by the needs of the families. They need a responsive infrastructure of support to provide quality services to children while partnering with adult-serving agencies. Partnerships can be encouraged through incentives at the federal, state, and local levels, including the promotion of statewide community planning efforts. A two-generation approach calls for the alignment and integration of resources targeted to education, economic supports, and social capital to improve immediate and long-term outcomes for the whole family. In fact, adaptive infrastructure and cohesive systems may be two of the most important factors to ensuring successful implementation and strong outcomes for both children and parents. Some promising state and community examples are highlighted below.

## STATE-LEVEL INITIATIVES

**Align and integrate child- and adult-serving agencies.** Colorado leaders in the Department of Human Services (headed by Ascend Fellow Reggie Bicha), the Department of Education, and the Lieutenant Governor's Office produced a Memorandum of Understanding articulating shared goals and objectives for building "a purposefully connected and coordinated system of early childhood services and programs that includes: 1) early learning; 2) family support and parent education; 3) social, emotional, and mental health; and 4) health for children and families in need." The state partners pledged to work in conjunction with other agencies and stakeholders, including the state's 30 local Colorado Early Childhood Councils, which focus on building early childhood systems at the county level.

**Leverage statewide networks.** Vermont delivers teen parent support programs through an existing network of 15 Parent Child Centers. With a grant from the federal Office of Adolescent Health, Vermont's Learning Together programs provide quality child care for babies and toddlers while their teen mothers participate in counseling, education, job readiness training, and other services. All services are delivered in the Parent Child Center if possible. Child care is delivered on-site or in a nearby facility and is defined as high quality by the state quality rating system. Thirty-eight states have statewide child care resource and referral networks that can potentially be partners in this work.

**Embed family engagement and support as a core element of quality.** At least 19 states have integrated Strengthening Families, an initiative of the Center for the Study

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*Sometimes I have to ask myself, 'Am I really doing this?' It's because it is laundry and it's grocery shopping and it's trying to work ... trying to balance the schedule out for the boys and trying to have some time for you. It gets overwhelming sometimes.*

— From focus group with low-income, African-American mothers, Richmond, Virginia, 2013

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of Social Policy, into their state Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). State QRISs identify elements of quality in early childhood programs and increase public awareness of quality. As part of its early childhood services, Strengthening Families focuses on factors such as social connections and concrete support in times of need to build the capacity of families. Idaho allows early childhood programs to use IdahoSTARS scholarships to fund provider training by certified Strengthening Families trainers. In addition to completing the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment and Action Plan, early childhood programs generate points toward their program's overall quality rating by offering relevant trainings; providing the opportunity for parents to learn, socialize, and volunteer; and tracking parent referrals to community resources.<sup>65</sup>

## COMMUNITY-LEVEL INITIATIVES

**Build social capital through neighborhood agency partnerships.** The partners of the Magnolia Community Initiative in Los Angeles recognize that services are not enough to improve the chances for success for the 35,000 children in a 500-block area

of Los Angeles. So the Initiative has set out to galvanize residents and public and private organizations to help create safe and supportive family environments. The Initiative has more than 70 participating organizations, representing county offices, the school district, WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) Food and Nutrition Services, child care resource and referral, and a cross-sector group of child and family service providers and community groups. Within the Initiative, early childhood stakeholders (e.g., child care; Early Head Start/Head Start; and family, friend, and neighbor care) are recruited to improve their practice by promoting the health and well-being of individuals, families, and neighborhoods and by ensuring families receive access to a full range of services offered by the network partners. Partners participate in a monthly "move the dot" meeting focused on improving family outcomes. Magnolia Community Initiative also collects child development data on kindergarteners, which is used to motivate neighborhood residents and parents to take positive actions in their own sphere of influence — family and neighborhood life.

**Utilize schools as hubs for delivering child and family services.** Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) is a county-wide initiative in Portland, Oregon, that coordinates local, state, and federal child and family services to provide a "backbone" for a new system of care through schools.<sup>66</sup> SUN staff are stationed in 64 community schools across Multnomah County, including 24 elementary and 18 K-8 schools. Early childhood services include parent-child play groups, parenting education and support services, developmental screening, referrals to other needed social and health services, and monthly home visits. Family services aligned and accessible through SUN include parent-family involvement and education; an anti-poverty initiative; health, mental health, and addiction services; and information and referrals and linkages.<sup>67</sup>

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*We have to go away from the notion that existed for so long in this country — that of the right to fail, or swim or sink — to the right to succeed.*

— Dr. Eduardo Padron, Miami Dade College, at the Aspen Ideas Festival, 2012

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## CONCLUSION

It is time to explore and promote the potential of early childhood development programs as gateways for two-generation approaches that support children and parents together. Research findings motivate the approach, innovative practices are generating results, and, as important, parents believe two-generation approaches are needed to increase their chances for achieving family educational success and economic security. The early childhood field is working to improve the quality of services provided directly to children, and it is evolving its approach to the family. With strong partners, these services can be leveraged to reach and effectively support families. Innovations occurring at the program, community, and state levels provide a snapshot of what is possible – and a view into the future.

Ascend at the Aspen Institute is committed to promoting policies and providing guidance to ensure this potential becomes more clearly realized. In 2014, Ascend at the Aspen Institute will continue to convene diverse leaders to explore the potential of two-generation approaches and will release federal and state policy ideas to move this vision closer to a reality. In upcoming publications, policymakers and other stakeholders eager to support children and families' economic stability and early success will find practical and feasible options that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public dollars. Ascend will also release several tools to help programs, communities, and systems evaluate their own capacity for two-generation approaches and learn how to facilitate partnerships to increase their impact. The work is challenging, but the potential to increase overall economic security and well-being for families is great. Change that moves children and their parents toward educational success and economic security is well within our grasp.

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*I think the biggest thing for me is trying to figure out how I am going to take care of myself and how am I going to set my children up for success.*

— From focus group with low-income, Latina mothers  
Denver, Colorado, 2013

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**TWO GENERATIONS,  
ONE FUTURE.**



## APPENDIX A

### ENGAGING PARENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT: MILESTONES 1965–CURRENT

#### Landmark Programs

**Head Start** – With the creation of Head Start in 1965, federal funding was dedicated to a comprehensive early childhood development program for parents and children. Head Start was one of the first major national initiatives to embody a two-generation approach. The original program recommendations stated “parents should be involved both for their own and their children’s benefit.”<sup>68</sup> Head Start has traditionally focused on parent participation (e.g., classroom volunteers, parent education), and current standards reflect an evolution to collaborative partnership-building to, for example, identify family goals and supports.<sup>69</sup>

**Child Care Development Block Grant** – By 1980, two-thirds of women ages 25-44 were in the labor force,<sup>70</sup> making child care a growing necessity. In 1990, the first major federal resource was established to help low-income families pay for child care: the Child Care Development Block Grant. Funding has never met the need for access to quality care; currently less than one in six eligible children is served.

**Early Head Start** – In 1994, spurred by emerging findings on early brain development, federal leaders created the Early Head Start program to provide comprehensive child development services — both at home and in centers — to pregnant women, children under age three, and their families. Early Head Start shared Head Start’s emphasis on parent and community partnerships, with a stronger emphasis on family self-sufficiency.

**Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV)** – While federal legislation for a nationwide home visiting initiative did not become a reality until the creation of the MIECHV Program in 2010, early home visiting programs emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, in the early 1960s, Dr. Phyllis Levenstein created a program that focused on parents as a child’s key to later school success. The Mother-Child Home Program (now the

Parent-Child Home Program) aimed to strengthen parent-child interactions and build literacy-rich home environments. In the early 1970s, Dr. David Olds began to develop the Nurse-Family Partnership, which introduced vulnerable first-time parents to caring maternal and child health nurses. Both of these models, and others, resulted in long-term gains for children and parents in the areas of health, education, and overall well-being. The Affordable Care Act included a five-year \$1.5 billion investment for the MIECHV Program. Designed in part to provide comprehensive services to families in at-risk communities, MIECHV-funded services are intended to produce better health and education outcomes for children as well as improvements in family economic self-sufficiency.

#### Systems Efforts

**National Education Goals** – In 1990, President George H.W. Bush and 50 governors participated in the National Education Goals Panel, producing six goals to be achieved by 2000. Prior to the major movement around early childhood systems, this effort was an antecedent to later work in both systems and frameworks. The first goal — all children start school ready to learn — demonstrated a holistic view of school readiness as indicated through the goal’s language: “... every parent in the United States will be a child’s first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent’s preschool child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need; and ... children will receive the nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies ... .”

**The BUILD Initiative** – In 2002, the Early Childhood Funders’ Collaborative supported the launch of the BUILD Initiative, which has since cultivated leadership and innovative action around state early childhood systems building. In collaboration with other stakeholders, BUILD developed a Vision of a Comprehensive State Child Development System, which includes early learning, health, and family leadership and support. It has been widely disseminated and used to guide state planning for system reform.

**State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems** – The year 2003 marked the first

major federal effort to address disparate early childhood development state systems, including parent supports. The Health Resources and Services Administration launched the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) state grants to build and integrate systems toward the ultimate goal of improved child health and learning readiness. Five key service components were emphasized, including early care and education, parenting education, and family support.

**State Advisory Councils** – In many states, the collaborations and systems developed through the ECCS grants became the building blocks for State Advisory Councils, authorized by the Head Start Act of 2007 and funded in 2009. From 2010 through 2013, 45 states received a combined \$100 million to support the work of State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care. The councils are charged with developing a high-quality, comprehensive early childhood system and ensuring statewide coordination and collaboration among relevant education and care programs. This includes child care; Head Start; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; preschool, infants, and families programs; and prekindergarten programs and services. Councils have made significant progress on a diverse set of activities, such as early learning standards, professional development, and coordination of federally funded and state-funded programs and services.

### Recent Frameworks

**Strengthening Families Protective Factors — Family Support** – In the 1970s, new concepts of family support moved away from a deficit approach — seeking to “fix” needy families — to a less-stigmatizing, strength-based approach. For example, the work of child development expert Bernice Weissbourd, founder of Family Focus, influenced a movement of family support initiatives across the country. In the 2000s, the *Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework* was developed and refined by the Center for the Study of Social Policy as a research-based approach to preventing child abuse and neglect through new collaborations among the early childhood, child abuse prevention, and child protective services sectors. The framework includes five protective factors

important for families and communities to help families thrive: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children. At least 30 states have active efforts to embed the protective factors into their early childhood systems through policy, funding, and training.<sup>71</sup>

**Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework** – Released in August 2011 by the Office of Head Start, this framework refines the program's commitment to a two-generation approach. Although Head Start has long included comprehensive program performance standards governing partnerships with families and communities, the new framework marks an increased focus on partnerships and family support



to promote positive child development. A corresponding federally funded technical assistance center, the Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, is charged with identifying, developing, and disseminating best practices.

### Current Initiatives

Several initiatives launched under the current administration significantly address early childhood; two are highlighted here:

**Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Fund** – Administered jointly by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this initiative is the most significant competitive grant to address school readiness, especially for vulnerable children. With an emphasis on innovation and a systems-based approach to high-quality early childhood development, the fund offers states opportunities to embed parent engagement into their efforts.

**Promise Neighborhoods** – Launched in 2010 by the U.S. Department of Education, Promise Neighborhoods aims to improve education outcomes for children in at-risk communities through the implementation of "cradle-to-career" services. The Promise Neighborhood approach supports

community transformation through strategies that include a continuum of academic programs, family and community supports, and an integrated approach to programs intended to break down agency "silos." Several Promise Neighborhood sites around the country have formally adopted a two-generation framework as part of their program design, including Buffalo, New York; Washington, DC; and Langley Park, Maryland.



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