

The Racial Generation Gap and the Future for Our Children

Bruce Lesley, President | January 2016

Introduction

Children are not faring well in America. Over the course of the two-year presidential campaign cycle that is well underway, eight million children will be born in this country. If our nation's elected leaders do nothing, more than 75,000 of those children born in this country below the age of 2 will be abused or neglected, over 500,000 will be uninsured, and nearly two million will live in poverty — a disadvantage that research has shown to have lifelong negative consequences for their education, income, health, and well-being.

Despite the fact that the public recognizes these problems, is deeply concerned about the future for children, and opposes cutting public investments in children's programs such as education, early childhood, child health, and efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect,¹ the federal share of spending dedicated to children continues to decline and is now less than 8 percent of the federal budget.² In fact, children have absorbed a disproportionate share of budget cuts to address the federal budget deficit, a problem that children did not create.

Consequently, the future for our nation's children and our nation stands at a crossroads. Congress has set a budgetary course that would lead to further declines in the federal share of funding dedicated to children. As the Urban Institute has found, congressional gridlock would lead to deep reductions in important investments in our nation's children over the next decade and, without change from the current budget course, the drop in the share of federal funding dedicated to children could be substantial. According to the Urban Institute:

Total expenditures on children, including both outlays and tax expenditures, are projected under current law to fall relative to the size of the economy, from 2.8 percent of GDP in 2013 to 2.3 percent in 2024. While the share of the population under age 19 is contracting slightly over this period, from 25 to 24 percent, its relatively modest share of the economy will fall by about one-fifth.³

Children desperately need something to upset and change the current status quo or their well-being and future prospects will suffer. Changing demographics and their implications on public policy and politics in America will undoubtedly play an important role in either improving the status of our nation's children or in leading to further declines.

In his book *Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics Are Remaking America*, demographer and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution William H. Frey cites a “cultural generation gap” or “racial generation gap” between a rapidly changing and increasingly racially diverse youth population and a growing and predominately white older generation as a critically important trend that our nation must face and address.⁴

One important concern is whether senior citizens, who disproportionately vote, will see fit to make much needed investments in our nation's children. There are a number of studies, including analysis by First Focus, which show communities and states with a wide racial gap between the generations often result in a reduced level of support for children's programs, such as education.

Another concerning demographic trend is that the areas where the population of children is growing the fastest are also the places – the Southwest, the Southeast, and Appalachia – where the outcomes of children typically are the worst.

On the other hand, there are some important trends that indicate American voters recognize children in America are not faring well and are looking for elected officials to make important investments in our nation's children, including the parents of the increasingly racially diverse youth. These voters, particularly Hispanics, are rapidly growing and becoming more influential in the political process. That can be game-changing, if those voters are willing to demand that policymakers make investments in children.

Moreover, there is a significant gender gap in terms of support for children's programs among older voters, as older women express much higher levels of support for investing in kids than older men. Fortunately, another important positive trend is that younger men between the ages of 18 and 29 are closing the gender gap and expressing much higher levels of support for issues of importance to children than their fathers. Some speculate this may be due to the changing gender roles and increased responsibility that young men are facing with raising their children. Whatever the reason, if that trend continues, overall public support for

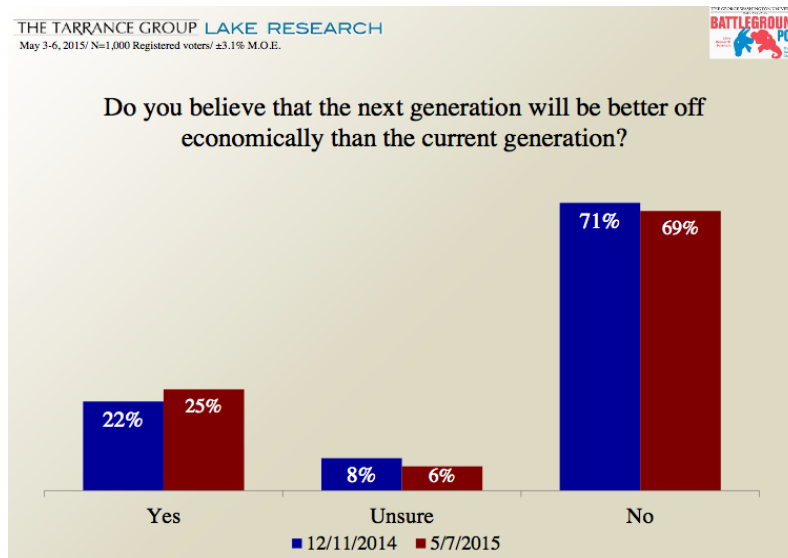
making investments in children will continue to grow.

The future for America's children is in question. We can either embrace the status quo and current budgetary path whereby children, who will be asked to pay off the growing federal debt, are also losers in the competition over public resources. Or, we can embrace our growing diversity and make those necessary investments so that the lives and well-being of our nation's children improves and helps ensure a more prosperous American future.

The American Public is Deeply Concerned About the Future for Children

Change is the law of life. And those who only look to the past or present are certain to miss the future. – John F. Kennedy, June 1963

The American people are deeply concerned about the well-being and future of the next generation. In a GW Battleground Poll in May by The Tarrance Group and Lake Research, by a 69-25 percent margin, American voters said they do not believe the next generation will be better off economically than the current generation.⁵



Chris Cillizza of the *Washington Post* points out, “The numbers from the Battleground Poll echo other data that has come out over the past few years that suggests a deep pessimism within the electorate about what sort of country they are leaving their children.”⁶

This pessimism reflects a growing concern that Americans have when they see that children have fared poorly during the recession and appear to be the last demographic group to fully recover.

In an American Viewpoint poll in December 2013, only 13 percent of voters said that the lives of children are improved over the previous decade, while 57 percent said the lives of children had become worse.⁷ The poll represents a reality that Americans have been seeing in their communities and families. As the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *2015 KIDS COUNT Data Book* highlights:

In 2013, nearly a third of children (31 percent) were living in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment. The child poverty rate remained stubbornly high. At 22 percent in 2013, it was still several percentage points higher than before the recession.⁸

Moreover, a 2014 report by UNICEF, *Children of the Recession: The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Child Well-Being in Rich Countries*, found that 32.2 percent of U.S. children in 2012 lived in households with an income below 60 percent of the national median income.⁹ Using this definition of poverty and inequality, the *Washington Post's* Christopher Ingraham reported that the United States ranked 36th out of 41 wealthy countries in the UNICEF report.¹⁰

As Texas Governor Ann Richards would have said, “That ain’t gonna cut it folks.”

If we are going to make a positive impact on the future life-course outcomes of children in this nation, the fact is that we must make investments in children. As the *Kids’ Share 2014* report by the Urban Institute says:

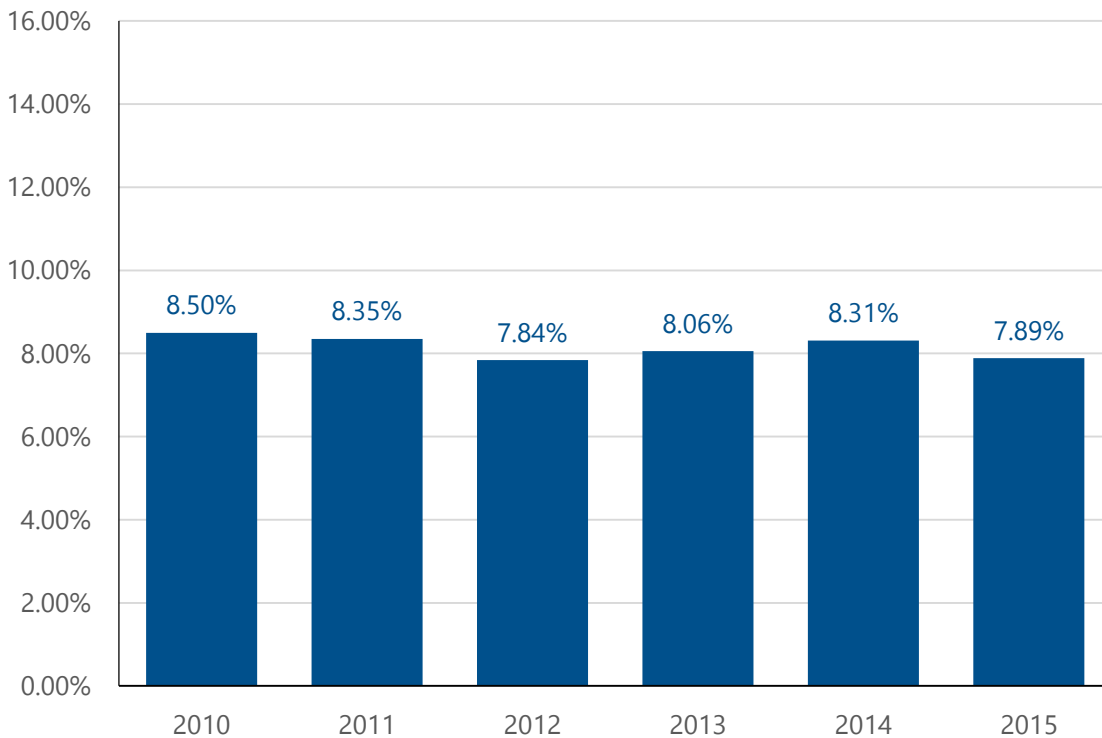
Without adequately funded education, nutrition, housing, early education and care, and other basic supports, the foundation of children’s well-being is at risk. When children grow up without adequate supports, they are less able to support themselves and to contribute to economic growth as adults.¹¹

Children in our nation face an uncertain future that depends, in large part, on the decisions that adults make on their behalf. Unfortunately, there are a number of troubling trends that foretell a poor future for our nation’s children.

The Nation’s Federal Investment in Children is Declining

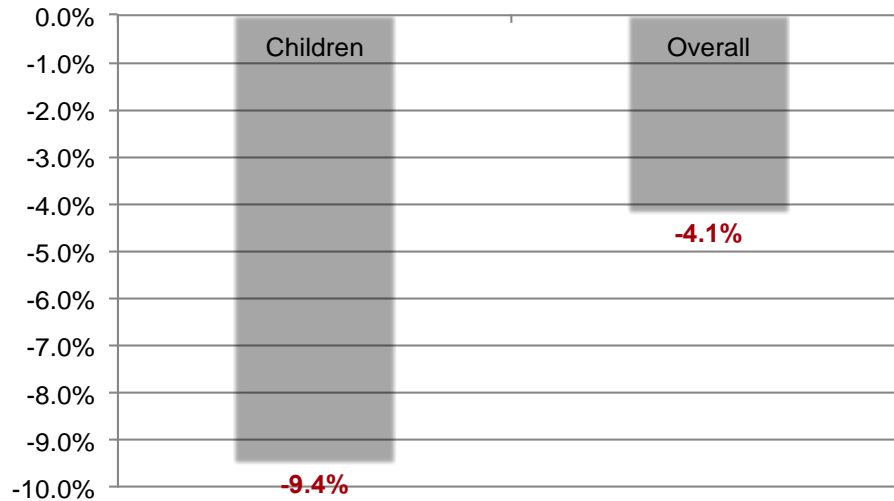
The federal government continues to divest in its support of our nation’s children, according to data from First Focus’s *Children’s Budget 2015*.¹² The share of spending on children dropped to just 7.89 percent of the federal budget in 2015, down from 8.50 percent in 2010.

Total Children’s Spending as a Percent of Total Government Spending



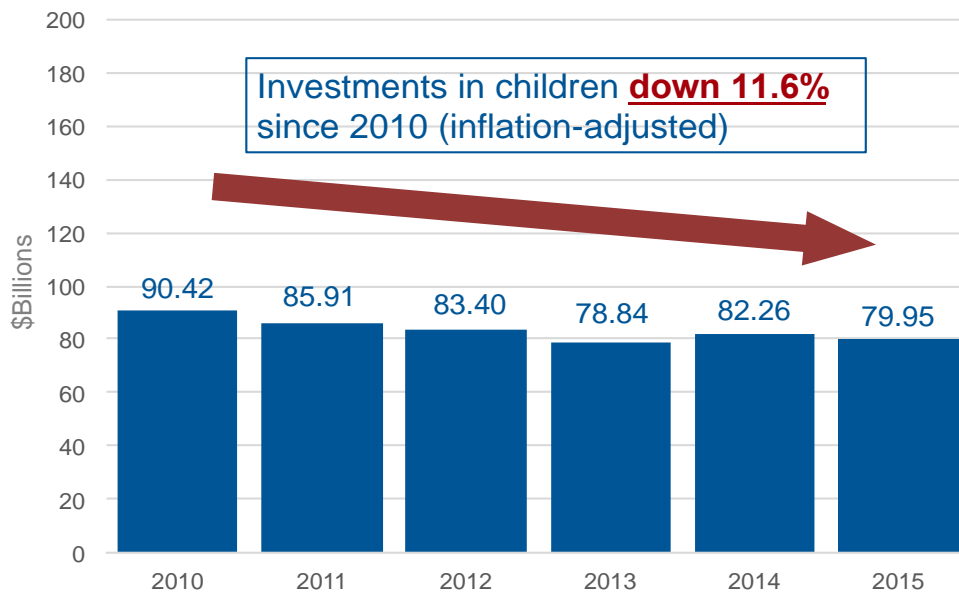
While some point out that federal spending is down overall due to efforts to cut the federal deficit, cuts to children have been disproportionate. In fact, although real spending is down 4.1 percent overall from 2011 to 2015, cuts to children’s programs have been more than twice as deep (9.4 percent).¹³

% Drop in Federal Spending 2011-2015 (inflation-adjusted)



In contrast to spending on the elderly, where the vast majority of spending is on the mandatory side of the federal budget and thereby not subject to the annual appropriations process, a higher percentage of federal spending for children is on the discretionary side of the federal budget. Unfortunately for children's programs, Congress has chosen to subject the programs on the discretionary side of the budget to significant cuts and hard spending limits, or "sequestration," in an effort to cut the federal budget deficit. The result of these caps is that, if Congress enacts annual appropriations bills that exceed these hard caps, an across-the-board spending cut is automatically imposed on discretionary programs.

Consequently, on an inflation-adjusted basis, discretionary spending on children is now down 11.6 percent since 2010, with the largest cuts happening in 2011 and when sequestration was imposed in 2013.



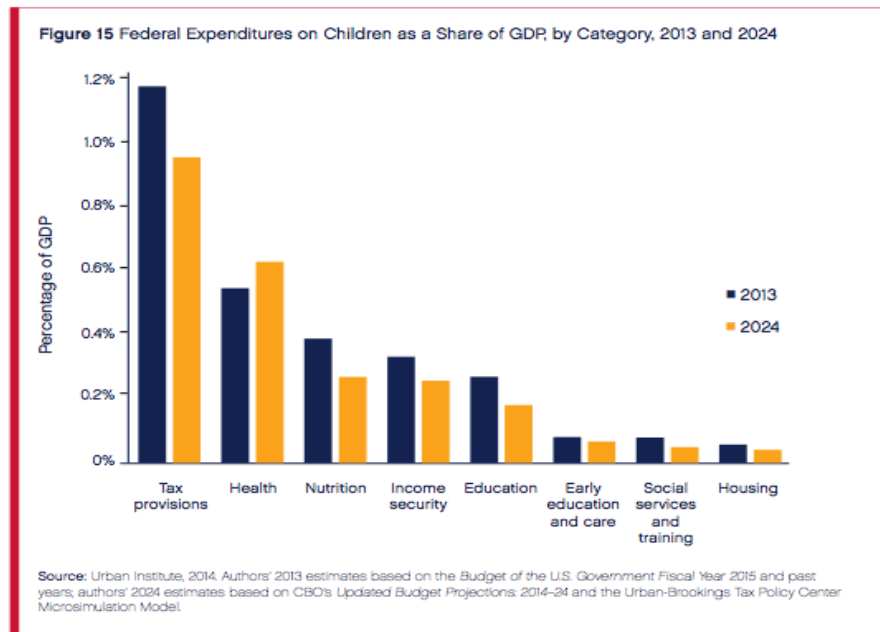
Cuts to education (down 16.6 percent since 2010) and reductions to funding dedicated to combat child abuse and neglect (down 10.1 percent since 2010) highlight and exemplify the downward trend in funding for children over the period.¹⁴

According to *Newsweek's* Anna Bernasek:

...the young and vulnerable especially have been hit hard through automatic federal spending cuts to programs like Head Start, nutrition assistance, and child welfare. Financial crises in cities like Philadelphia and Detroit have meant another wave of school budget cutbacks. And the weak job market is hurting the youngest workers most, with youth unemployment more than double the national jobless rate.¹⁵

Even worse, because of the discretionary budget limits imposed through 2021 (even though temporarily lifted by the recent budget deal for two years),¹⁶ the Urban Institute finds that, unless Congress makes significant changes to the current budget law's trajectory over the long-term, all spending categories other than health will continue to decline for children over the next decade. According to the report's projections:

Social services and training has the largest decline (38 percent), but child-related spending on education, nutrition programs, and housing also are projected to decline by 25 percent or more over the next decade, when measured as a percentage of GDP.¹⁷



Source: *Kids' Share 2014*, Urban Institute, 2014

This is counter to the wishes of the American people. In a poll by American Viewpoint, although American voters overwhelmingly expressed concern about addressing federal budget deficits, they also said that Congress should do so without harming children's programs.¹⁸

For example, when asked if Congress should cut specific programs in order to reduce the federal budget deficit, American voters strongly opposed cutting funding to programs dedicated to children, including education (74-21 percent), the prevention of child abuse (77-18 percent), children's health (67-21 percent), and Head Start (64-31 percent).

Opposition to cutting programs focused on the elderly is also very strong. In fact, voters opposed cutting Social Security by an 81-14 percent margin and opposed cutting Medicare by an 82-15 percent margin, with 72 percent and 68 percent strongly opposing such cuts, respectively.

Americans appear to agree with the words of Hubert H. Humphrey when he said, "The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped."¹⁹

However, in order to test the depth of support for protecting children's programs, voters were asked to specifically choose and prioritize either children or the elderly in the federal budget. When pressed, voters chose to make children the priority by a 2-1 margin (51-24 percent). Even voters over the age of 65 said, if they had to choose, that they would make children the federal budget priority by a 44-25 percent margin.²⁰

Therefore, there is apparent salience and depth to the support that the American people have for protecting children from budget cuts, even if Congress seems to be ignoring it.

Demographic Change #1: Children Are Leading a Demographic Transformation

An important demographic change has been occurring among America's children in recent years that will have profound implications on our nation for decades to come. That change is highlighted by the fact that, for the first time in 2011, babies born in America were "majority-minority".²¹ As they have aged, today a majority of children under age 5 are non-white.

This trend among children is rapidly changing the makeup of American society and demands a conversation around the generational compact between children and senior citizens. As *National Journal* reporter Ronald Brownstein said, "The demographic revolution transforming the U.S. belongs to the young."²²

The implications of these demographic changes are that, if we want a country that will continue to be strong and successfully compete with other nation's across the world, we must make needed investments to improve the lives and outcomes for all of our children and to eliminate racial disparities.

Demographic Change #2: The Growing Racial Generation Gap

One major challenge facing children is that there is a body of research and polling data that indicates older voters are strong advocates for programs of importance to them, including Social Security and Medicare, but express far weaker levels of support for specific children's issues. Therefore, even if senior citizens say that they would make children a greater priority when asked to choose, they overwhelmingly say that seniors issue like Social Security and Medicare are the most important issue in deciding their vote for Congress than children's issues like education and early childhood.²³

And when it comes to voting, senior citizens vote, children do not, and even parents, particularly fathers, often make children's issues a secondary concern with their vote.²⁴ Due to these factors, it is not surprising that the federal budget represents this growing prioritization of programs of importance to senior citizens rather than children.

In addition, as senior citizens continue to age and are largely white and our nation's youth are increasingly Hispanic, African-American, and Asian-American, there is a growing "cultural generation gap" or "racial generation gap" in America that demographer William Frey defines as the percentage difference between the population of white senior citizens to white children.²⁵

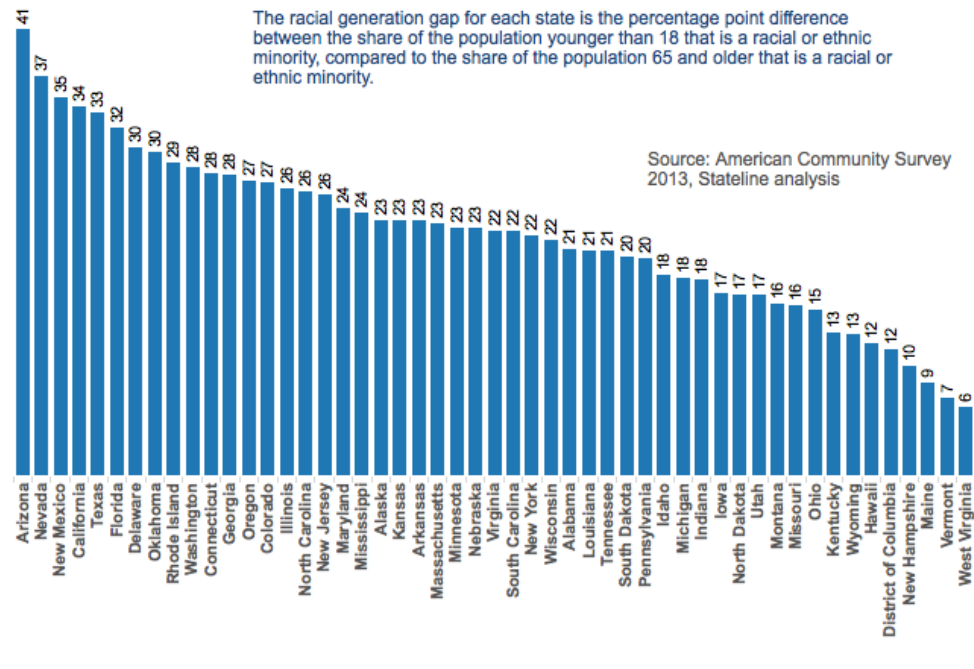
Frey says:

*...this youth-driven diversity surge is also creating a 'cultural generation gap' between the diverse youth population and the growing, older, still predominately white population. This gap is reflected in negative attitudes among many older whites toward immigration, new minority growth, and big government programs that cater to the real economic and educational needs of America's younger, more diverse population.*²⁶

According to Frey:

*This gap is not a result of racist attitudes per se. It reflects the social distance between minority youth and an older population that does not feel a personal connection with young adults and children who are not 'their' children and grandchildren.*²⁷

Racial Generation Gap



For example, Arizona has the highest racial generation gap of 41 in the country (82 percent of Arizona’s population over the age of 65 is white compared to just 41 percent of its children). Explains Frey:

Arizona leads the nation in an emerging generation gap that reflects both culture and race. Because of its continued draw of mostly white seniors from other parts of the country and its sharp gain in youthful immigrants and U.S.-born minorities over the past 20 years, the state’s over-65 population is far whiter than its child population (82 percent vs. 41 percent white). It has, in many ways, become ground zero for the politics of fear, famous for tamping down ethnic studies in public schools and passing strict immigration measures²⁸

Compared to other states, Arizona also underinvests in its children. For example, the state spends the least amount of money per student in the country, according to the National Education Association’s *Ranking and Estimates* report.²⁹ And, since 2008, Arizona has, on an inflation-adjusted basis, cut its per pupil spending on education by 17.5 percent, which is the third worst in the country.³⁰

Arizona has also reduced support for cash assistance to families with children in poverty rather dramatically, from providing support to more than half of families with children in poverty in 1996 to less than 10 percent of poor families in 2013.³¹ Even for the rapidly declining fraction of the 26 percent of Arizona’s children living in poverty to receive any assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the monthly allotment was cut by 20 percent and the maximum life-time limit for participation in TANF will be cut to just 12 months in July 2016, which will make Arizona the only state in the country with a limit below 21 months.³²

Beyond those cuts, Arizona has also slashed its investment in child care for low-income working families. According to the Children’s Action Alliance, “Enrollment was frozen in 2009 and participation dropped from 16,191 working families to fewer than 4,000 by 2014.”³³

And, due to a number of factors that include the combination of child care cuts with inadequate funding for support to much needed child welfare caseworkers, the state’s child welfare system has seen a dramatic surge in the number of incidents of child abuse and neglect and foster care placements.³⁴ In January 2014, Arizona’s Child Protective Services was dissolved and replaced with a new Department of Child Safety, but the

continued lack of investment has left the system “broken” and “not suitable for children.”³⁵

Finally, despite the fact that federal financial support to Arizona’s Children’s Health Insurance Program, or KidsCare, is now at 100 percent, the Grand Canyon State froze its program in 2010 and is the only state in the country that does not have a fully operating program.³⁶ Not surprising, the consequence is that Arizona has one of the highest uninsured rates for children in the nation, another poor indicator for Arizona’s kids.³⁷

Clearly, Arizona’s lack of investment in its kids is across-the-board, systemic, and devastating to its majority-minority child population. In sharp contrast, the Arizona State Legislature has found hundreds of millions of dollars to slash taxes to its wealthy individual and corporations. According to the Children’s Action Alliance in Arizona, “Today, the individual income tax rate for the highest income bracket is less than two-thirds of what it was in 1990, while in 2017, the corporate income tax will be just over half (52 percent) of what it was in 1992.”³⁸

The question, as Frey asks, is whether Arizona is a “precursor of things to come elsewhere?”³⁹

Like Frey, Atlantic Media’s Editorial Director Ronald Brownstein has focused on the political implications that the growing demographic racial disparity between generations may have. Brownstein argues:

*The nation faces the risk of sustained political tension between its racially diverse, Democratic-leaning youth population and its predominately white, Republican-trending senior population – what I’ve called the Brown and the Gray.*⁴⁰

He adds:

*Over time, the major focus in this struggle is likely to be the tension between an aging white population that appears increasingly resistant to taxes and dubious of public spending, and a minority population that overwhelmingly views government education, health, and social-welfare programs as the best ladder of opportunity for its children.*⁴¹

The politics of this can be potentially devastating to children. As an example, Brownstein cites growing “unsustainable” and “ominous” budget problems due to the large federal budget deficit, which the next generation will be asked to pay off, and “the budget’s accelerating tilt toward the elderly over the young and toward consumption over investment.”⁴²

This places future investments and long-term well-being of the next generation into question. Unfortunately, there are a number of studies that indicate communities and states with growing racial generation gaps tend to support lower levels of investment in children than in other states and communities.

For example, a landmark 1996 National Bureau of Economic Research study by James Poterba, *Demographic Structure and the Political Economy of Public Education*, found that:

*... an increase in the fraction of a jurisdiction’s population over the age of 65 tends to reduce per-child school spending, and that the effect is especially pronounced when the elderly residents are from a different ethnic group than the school-age population.*⁴³

Poterba concludes:

*These findings, if they in fact reflect tensions between generations in the allocation of public funds, suggest that the changing demographic profile of the United States may lead to long-term reductions in the level of per-child school expenditure.*⁴⁴

In fact, Poterba projected that his findings coupled with the projected growth in the percentage of elderly in America between 1990 and 2030 “would translate . . . into a ten percent reduction in per child spending” and that “the potential effects could be substantial.”⁴⁵

Catherine Rampell, columnist for the *Washington Post*, cited this study as evidence that the country may “end up systematically underinvesting in an entire generation of Americans.”⁴⁶

As she writes:

In other words: Old people don't like to spend money on the young, and voters more broadly are less supportive of social spending when a population becomes more diverse. Layer the "graying" onto the "browning," and it starts to look unlikely that empathy will pave the way to expanded social spending for young people. The fact that the young look different from the old in ways besides age and ethnicity — including family structures — suggests other barriers to intergenerational empathy, too.⁴⁷

Subsequent studies, to varying degrees, have affirmed the Poterba study's conclusions.⁴⁸

Researchers and advocates point to a number of different reasons for this dynamic. For example, a number of studies "suggest that more elderly aging in place are associated with increased school spending, while a higher fraction of elderly migrants is associated with decreased school spending."⁴⁹ This makes sense, as voters are more inclined to support public funding and taxes for things they are attached to (e.g., the local schools often define a community) or recognize external benefits from (e.g., higher property values, reduced crime, etc.), rather than things with which they do not share an affinity due to having recently moved to that community.⁵⁰

However, others argue that the correlation found by Poterba and other studies may be due to the fact that many of the states with a high racial generation gap, including the top three states of Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico, are poorer than the average state so the low investment in children may be due to the fact that these states simply have less wealth from which to draw.

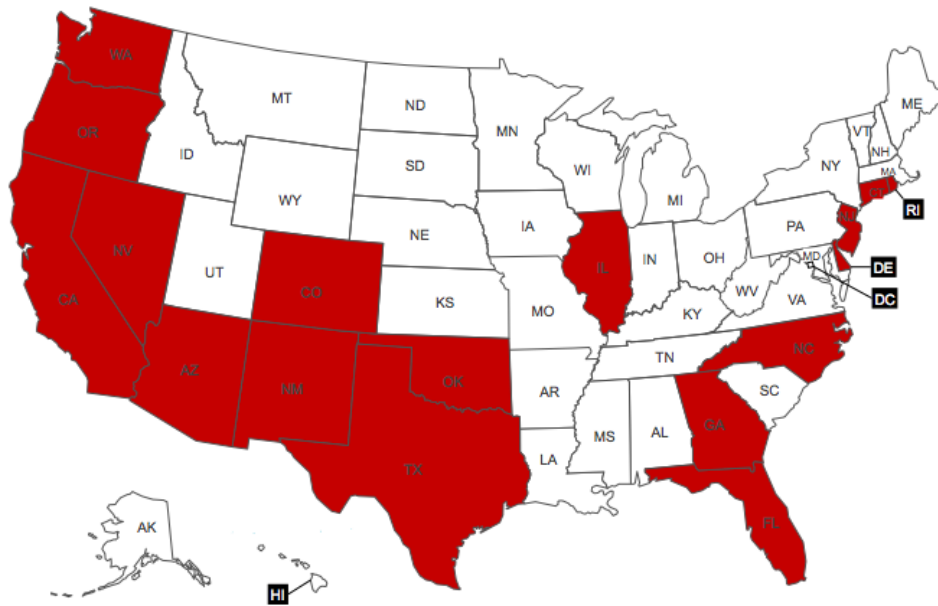
States with a High Racial Generation Gap Demonstrate Less Effort in Support of Public Education

To test this hypothesis, First Focus compared the states, as identified by Frey, with the highest "racial generation gap"⁵¹ to the state rankings and grading system established by the Education Law Center that is based on the states' level of "effort" rather than overall spending levels.

The "Effort Index" created by the Education Law Center "takes into account each state's local and state spending on education in relation to the state's economic productivity, or gross state product. Combining these two elements into a ratio provides a sense of the level of priority state and local budgets assigned to education."⁵² Consequently, a poor state like West Virginia has one of the Effort Index's highest scores, despite being a low spending state, and a wealthy state like North Dakota is scored as having the lowest effort, despite having relatively high spending per capita.

The results of this analysis show a clear inverse relationship between those states with higher racial generation gaps and the Effort Index. In other words, states with a higher racial generation gap provide significantly less effort in supporting public education than those states with less diversity between the generations.

Cultural Gap/Racial Generation Gap: > 25%



In fact, if you look at the 17 states with a “higher racial generation gap” of 26 to 41 (e.g., the highest one-third of states)⁵³ and compare them to the 33 states with a much lower racial generation gap of 17 to 24, the Education Law Center’s “Effort Index” would assign them the following different letter grades:

	Higher Racial Generation Gap (17 states)	Lower Racial Generation Gap (33 states)
High Effort: A or B Grade	4 (23.5%)	15 (45.5%)
Moderate Effort: C or D Grade	3 (17.6%)	12 (36.3%)
Low Effort: F Grade	10 (58.8%)	6 (18.2%)

Thus, even when you take into account a state’s wealth, it is clear that states with higher racial generation gaps provide far less effort in funding and support to their state’s public schools than states with less diversity between the generations.

In fact, states with a higher racial generation gap are 2 ½ times more likely to receive an Effort Index grade of F rather than an A or B. In sharp contrast, “lower racial generation gap states” are 2 ½ times more likely to receive an Effort Index grade of A or B instead of an F.

As a result, states with higher racial generation gaps are only about half as likely to receive a grade of A or B as those with lower racial generation gaps. Even worse, the higher racial generation gap states are 223 percent more likely to receive the lowest grade of F in the Effort Index than the more homogeneous states.

Demographic Trend #3: Geographic Problems Facing Our Nation’s Children

When it comes to improving the well-being of our nation’s children, another demographic trend of deep concern is that the geographic regions with the largest growth in children over the last decade are the areas with the poorest outcomes for children.

According to Steve Murdock, former Census Bureau Director in the Bush Administration, and his co-authors Michael Cline and Mary Zey, kids in the Southwest region (defined by them as the seven states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado) are "increasingly an important center of growth in the number of children, particularly minority children, in the United States."⁵⁴

These seven states accounted for:

- 90 percent of the 2000-2010 increase in the nation's child population;
- More than half of America's Hispanic child population;
- Nearly one-third of American Indian and Alaskan Native children in the United States; and,
- More than 40 percent of America's Asian child population.⁵⁵

As such, it is a place that holds the key for much of our nation's future.

Unfortunately, the Southwest is not faring well by its children. Using over 16 different indicators, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *2015 KIDS COUNT Data Book* ranked the 50 states by child outcomes and found that six of the states in the southwestern region of the country, including California (38th), Oklahoma (39th), Texas (41st), Arizona (46th), Nevada (47th), and New Mexico (49th), were among the 13 worst states based on key child indicators, such as child poverty, infant mortality, and high school graduation rates.⁵⁶

In addition to these six states in the Southwest, the other states that rank among the worst were in the southeastern and Appalachian states of Kentucky (34th), North Carolina (35th), Tennessee (36th), Florida (37th), Georgia (40th), South Carolina (42nd), West Virginia (43rd), Arkansas (44th), Alabama (45th), Louisiana (48th), and Mississippi (50th).⁵⁷

A common theme among these 17 states that plays a major role in their poor performance is that they invest fewer resources in their children than the national average.⁵⁸ Some of this is attributable to the fact these regions of the country are poorer than the national average. However, once again, a major factor here is the lack of effort these states make.

economically successful in the future.

He points out that we live in a global economy and this dictates Texas ensures the next generation is highly educated in order to remain competitive. However, Texas cut public education spending by over \$5 billion in 2011. These cuts were devastating and exacerbated funding inequities so greatly that Texas's school finance system has been ruled in a District Court to be both inadequate and unconstitutional.⁶²

Parker writes:

If more of the new majority in Texas don't go to college and increase their earning power, consumer spending will fall. The ability to sustain the tax base, particularly property taxes, will be in jeopardy. This will affect not just Hispanics; it will impact everyone, regardless of ethnicity or age, individuals, businesses and institutions - private and public - alike. The entire Texas boom, which could power the American economy through the rest of the century, would stutter and stall.⁶³

Such an outcome would be bad for both America's next generation and their elders. As Brownstein points out:

Although it's rarely discussed now, both groups share an interest in equipping the young to obtain middle-class jobs that will generate the tax base to support a decent safety net for the old.⁶⁴

Frey is optimistic that America's voters and elected officials will recognize the need for greater investment in the next generation of children. He writes that:

... a growing diverse, globally connected minority population will be absolutely necessary to infuse the aging American labor force with vitality and to sustain populations in many parts of the country that are facing population declines. Rather than being feared, America's new diversity – poised to reinvigorate the country at a time when other developed nations are facing advanced aging and population loss – can be celebrated.⁶⁵

Fortunately, there are some signs that point to the possibility of change that will increase the support for increased investments in our children and our future. For one, the public is deeply concerned about the problems that our nation's children are facing. A Public Opinion Strategies poll just before the 2012 presidential election found 63 percent of voters said the candidates had not focused enough attention to children's issues and 82 percent said they would consider a candidate's position on federal funding for children's initiatives when they vote.⁶⁶

Moreover, when asked if Congress should cut funding to specific programs in order to reduce the federal budget deficit, American voters strongly opposed cutting funding to programs dedicated to children.⁶⁷

American Viewpoint Poll (December 2013)

In order to reduce the federal budget deficit, should Congress cut the following programs?

	<u>Support/Oppose</u>	<u>Strongly Oppose</u>
Education	23-74%	68%
Prevent Child Abuse	18-77%	67%
Children's Health	21-67%	57%
Head Start	31-64%	53%

Demographic Trend #4: Growth in Minority Voters who are Highly Supportive of Children's Programs

Furthermore, as the percentage of minority voters continues to rise, it is significant that both Hispanic and

African-American voters have consistently expressed much higher levels of opposition to cutting children’s programs.⁶⁸ And, as politicians feel the need to address the concerns of a growing minority voter base, particularly Hispanics, Congress and state legislatures will have to consider making greater investment in, or at least to discontinue cutting, popular children’s programs.

Opposition to Cutting Children’s Programs High Among White, Black, and Hispanic Voters (American Viewpoint Poll, December 2013)			
Programs to Cut in Order to Reduce the Federal Deficit	Support/Oppose		
	White	Black	Hispanic
Education	25-72%	19-79%	20-77%
Prevent Child Abuse	19-76%	15-81%	21-79%
Children’s Health	22-62%	19-79%	17-80%
Head Start	31-63%	28-72%	30-63%

In contrast to the data showing an increasing racial generation gap leads to declining investments in children, Hispanic voters show an intensity of support for children’s programs. Although Hispanics show very strong support for protecting programs like Medicare (79 percent oppose cuts) and Social Security (89 percent oppose cuts), when asked to make a choice, they said the federal government should make children a greater federal budget priority than the elderly by a 67-26 percent margin.⁶⁹

Demographic Trend #5: Changing Gender Roles and Growing Support among Younger Men for Children’s Issues

There is another very important trend among younger men that bodes well for children. In terms of public support for children’s issues, there has historically been a large gender gap in which women express much stronger support for making investments in children than men. However, as young men are taking on a greater share of child-rearing duties in families,⁷⁰ that gender gap appears to be disappearing.

For example, in an American Viewpoint poll in May 2014, American voters supported extension of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) by a 74-14 percent margin, or 60 percentage points. Women supported the renewal and extension of CHIP (77-12 percent or +65) by 10 percentage points more than men overall (71-16 percent or +55).⁷¹

For voters over the age of 60, there is a 28 percentage point swing in the level of support, as older women supported protecting CHIP by a much wider margin (79-8 percent or +71) than older men (64-21 percent or +43).

In sharp contrast, among younger voters between the ages of 18-29, women supported extension of CHIP (79-11 percent or +68) but young adult men supported it by an even wider margin (80-7 percent or +73).⁷²

Polling on other children’s issues, such as protecting early childhood programs, also show the same type of results. For example, voters oppose cutting early childhood programs to reduce the federal budget deficit by nearly a 2-to-1 margin (62-32 percent). Women oppose such cuts (66-29 percent) by a higher margin than men (59-36 percent), but the age trends are very much the same as you see with CHIP.

In fact, opposition to budget cuts for early childhood programs is consistently strong among women of all ages, as the level of opposition is right around 66 percent for every age group.

Again, there is a wide difference in the polling among men, as younger men strongly oppose cuts to early childhood programs by a substantial margin (73-18 percent or +55) while older men narrowly oppose the cuts (48-45 percent or +3).⁷³

In these two examples, younger men between 18-29 years old are shown to support CHIP by 30 percentage

points and early childhood programs by 52 percentage points more than men over 60 years of age. This is an enormous change across generations and, if this trend continues among younger men, it will have enormous positive ramifications in terms of growing future support for investing in children's programs.

Finally, young adults between 18-29 are over 20 times more likely to list children's issues as the most important issue in their vote for Congress than voters over the age of 65.⁷⁴

Change for Children in California

To answer Frey's question as to whether Arizona is a "precursor of things to come elsewhere?" the answer is maybe not. California, for instance, is demonstrating quite a different story or counter-narrative to Arizona's.

In the 1980s, demographic change in California resulted in a growing racial generation gap much like what Arizona is seeing. Due to a backlash against a growing immigration population in the state, policymakers imposed property tax caps, cut school spending, and pursued limits on immigration, bilingual education, and affirmative action.

But now, California's racial age gap is shrinking somewhat because the state's share of elderly minorities is increasing. And, the share of minority voters has grown, so the political dynamics in the state has radically changed.

According to an estimate by the Field Poll, "[M]ore than 90 percent of the net 3.3 million increase in the State's registered voters since 1994 has come from the ranks of Latinos and Asian-Americans."⁷⁵

Consequently, the political environment for children has begun improving. Although California starts at a per pupil spending level well below the national average, Governor Jerry Brown announced in May support for increases in funding for child care and higher education and his budget seeks to, as reported by the Los Angeles Times, "boost spending by \$3,000 for each of the state's 6 million K-12 students."⁷⁶

And, on immigration policy, California stands in sharp contrast to Arizona's more restrictive laws. As the *Sacramento Bee* editorial board explains, "California has created a new body of law, ranging from subsidized pediatric health care and protection against federal immigration enforcement to in-state tuition for undocumented students."⁷⁷

The changing demographics in California will increasingly be seen at the national level. Just as has occurred in California, the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that:

*Hispanics will account for 40 percent of the growth in the eligible electorate in the U.S. between now and 2030, at which time 40 million Hispanics will be eligible to vote, up from 23.7 million now.*⁷⁸

If Hispanics continue to support children's issues as strongly as they do now, politicians will have to take notice and give children's issues greater attention.

Forging a New Course for Children

Children are struggling to get much-needed support and investment in their development that they need in order to reach their full potential.

The *Washington Post's* Rampell worries that:

*For all the baby-kissing, politicians know it's the elderly – not suffrage-ineligible children, or their parents, who turn out to vote. This perhaps explains why a smaller and smaller share of government budgets is expected to go to children over the coming decade.*⁷⁹

Children do not have Political Action Committees (PACs) or hired lobbyists that can protect their interests.

So, what are the factors that would result in change for our kids?

As noted above, demographic changes have the potential to either help or harm children. Advocates for children will need to work diligently to amplify those factors that have the potential to be favorable to kids and minimize those factors that may cause additional harm and further disinvestment.

On the one hand, polling data and research clearly indicates that the American public will express deep concern about the future of our nation's children and make children a top concern when they are asked. Voters will even choose children over other major issues such as the federal deficit, senior citizens, and defense spending when children are on their mind.

Unfortunately, when out of sight and mind, voters often fail to think about children's issues. As an example, with few children in households of those over the age of 55, only 1 percent of those voters mention children's issues as a top priority for their vote.⁸⁰ In a focus group run by Republican messaging guru Frank Luntz for First Focus in Des Moines, Iowa, a few years ago, only one member of the focus group mentioned education as a critical issue in the election until Luntz asked them why they did not care about children.

At that point, people became extremely animated in support of children's issues and were angry that their support for children could possibly be questioned. Consequently, Luntz's team described children's policies as "scratch and sniff" issues because they do not immediately come to mind but generate great passion once brought to the forefront.

Children need adults to do that for them. As Elizabeth Reid points out:

Children . . . have a unique place in American democracy. Their rights and political agency are not as absolute or direct as those of adults. Thus, children's voices must be heard through organizations of parents and professionals who negotiate children's status in the courts and in the policy process.⁸¹

To do so, advocates for children must raise attention to the needs of children by reaching out, first and foremost, to their strongest supporters – women, African-Americans, Hispanics, and parents – and ask them to make children's issues a clear priority when they communicate with policymakers and in making their decision as to who will get their vote during federal, state, and local elections.

This problem for children's advocates is a long-standing one. As Sally Covington wrote over a decade ago:

Social policy advocates generation agree . . . that a renewed national commitment to vulnerable populations, including children, will only emerge through organized efforts to link citizens together in large networks capable of developing and implementing local, state, and national reform strategies.⁸²

Theda Skocpol and Jillian Dickert add:

A revitalized movement for children and families in America will depend on the ability of advocates to find new ways to link their efforts nationally and across state and local lines, and to reach out more effectively to parents and communities.⁸³

To help address this problem, First Focus is building The Children's Network – a collaboration of individuals and organizations dedicated to raising public awareness around issues of importance to children and urging policymakers to make children a greater priority in their decision-making.

In addition, a number of children's advocacy and professional organizations have come together to create a Children's Budget Coalition in order to create a unified advocacy voice to reverse the downward trend in federal spending for children.⁸⁴ As another example, over 1,500 national, state, and local organizations from across the country successfully pushed for Congress to extend CHIP.⁸⁵

Child advocates will also need to make the case to senior citizens that investments in children are important to our nation's future and even to their own well-being. As Frey says:

... the future well-being of seniors and the nation as a whole depends on the ability of today's youth to succeed in tomorrow's labor force. Youth will play a central role in contributing to the nation's economy and to the retirement and medical care programs that directly benefit the older population. . . . Attitudinal changes will occur but may take some time, as the long-held views of the baby boomers, who grew up in a highly segregated, low immigration, post-World War II America, slowly adapt to these inevitable generational shifts.⁸⁶

Frey adds:

Rather than seeing the inevitable changes as damaging to the American way of life, it will behoove the nation to consider the future of the country and prepare now for a country that will be majority-minority.⁸⁷

Gordon Chin highlights a few models of what he calls “intergenerational organizing” in his book *Building Community, Chinatown Style*.⁸⁸ He argues that:

... organizing among generations is a relatively newer idea, one which I believe has great promise in building and sustaining a broader base for social change. When talking about intergenerational organizing, I do not mean only short term coalitions to support our respective issues, but rather a sustained way of thinking and acting in our social justice organizations that involves seniors, youth and family leaders in all aspects of our program strategies and our organizational management and governance.

Even for those motivated purely by self-interest, cutting back on investments in kids will have long-term implications for all of us. On the recent raft of spending cuts that target and disadvantage children, Bernasek writes:

That has implications for long-term economic growth. Cutting back on the young is like eating the seed corn: satisfying a momentary need but leaving no way to grow a prosperous future.⁸⁹

Fortunately, a new generation of elected officials is being elected and is more likely to vote for changes that will benefit children in the long-term. For instance, our partners at First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC) have a “scorecard” that recognizes the U.S. House or Representatives and U.S. Senate’s top 100 Champions for Children based on a point system that recognizes votes, bill introductions, bill cosponsorships, and other public expressions of support for children.

In the case of women legislators, they are two to three times more likely than their male colleagues to be a Champion for Children. In addition, members of the Tri-Caucus in the House of Representatives (Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus) are more than 50 percent more likely to be a Champion for Children than the average member of the House. As legislative representation by women and minorities continues to increase at all levels of government, there is an expectation that support for children’s issues will grow.⁹⁰

FFCC is also seeing a new trend where a younger generation of men elected to Congress is demonstrating an increased level of support for children’s issues. In fact, in the last Congress, 22 of the 28 newly-named Champions for Children were from this younger generation of men.⁹¹ Again, as men are increasingly taking on a greater share of child-rearing duties, this may be translating into a better understanding of the needs of children by male legislators.

Consequently, it is important for voters to fully understand that children are on the ballot in virtually every election. Groups like Every Child Matters Education Fund and Save the Children Action Network are working to educate voters and candidates for office on these issues.⁹²

And, with growing numbers of female, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American legislators, who have disproportionately been Champions for Children, and a new generation of male legislators who appear to be more consciously pro-child than previous generations, a new coalition of legislators for children may be forming to willingly and proactively change the current course for our next generation toward the positive.

As President Franklin D. Roosevelt said 75 years ago, “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”⁹³

Conclusion

Based on a variety of indicators, whether Annie E. Casey Foundation's *KIDS COUNT*, UNICEF's *Overview of Child Well-Being*, or those in the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics' annual report, it is clear that children in this country are not faring well. Although we are making progress on some indicators, such as health insurance coverage for children, a number of other indicators have stagnated or fallen over the last decade.

The public is clearly deeply concerned about it, but unfortunately, federal policymakers are failing to respond to even issues of crisis, such as the fact that one in five children in this country live in poverty and the poverty rate for African-American and Hispanic children are now 38 and 33 percent, respectively.⁹⁴ Instead, Congress has cut funding and reduced the share of spending on our nation's children in recent years and have put the federal budget on a path where that share of spending on kids will continue to decline over the course of the next decade unless long-term changes are made.⁹⁵

Compounding the problem, cuts are also taking place at the state and local level. As Rampell writes:

State and local spending on children skidded downward in recent years, falling by about \$350 per child between 2008 and 2011 (the most recent year for which data are available). Public education has been particularly badly hit, with the number of people employed in public schools shrinking even as enrollment increased.

Much of this has been caused by shortfalls related to the recent recession. But even when the economy has fully recovered, localities' commitments to children may waver, particularly as baby boomers age.⁹⁶

Children stand at a crossroads where five major demographic changes, such as the growing racial generation gap, can either help correct or further exacerbate this problem. Manuel Pastor, Jennifer Ito, and Vanessa Carter with the University of Southern California (USC) add that there is also some insistence in addressing it. As they write:

We need to bridge the racial generation gap urgently. We have become a nation spinning apart – socially, economically, and even epistemically – when we need to be a nation growing together. We have many histories but we have a single destiny. . . .⁹⁷

For child advocates, there are four key steps necessary to create real and favorable policy change toward the goal of improving child well-being. They are:

- **Raise Awareness:** Solving the problems children face begins with understanding them. This highlights the need for increased policy research, data, and analysis. However, it also speaks to the need to make sure that the public, the media, policymakers, and other stakeholders have a full understanding of the needs and issues facing children.
- **Develop Policy:** Child advocates, far too often, pound home the “problem statement” without offering the necessary accompanying set of solutions. Therefore, child advocates must go beyond the first step and develop evidence-based policy solutions that will work. This requires translating research findings into practical policy solutions⁹⁸ and being savvy enough to identify and create windows of opportunities whereby the right policy solutions are presented at the right time.
- **Build Will:** Understand that information is not persuasion, child advocates and philanthropy must fully recognize that a good idea doesn't simply advance on its own. This requires taking message and solution to decision-makers directly and tearing down barriers to action by such actions as engaging national and state partner organizations, sponsoring public forums and raising up local voices, commissioning opinion research and sharing communications best practices, generating social media attention, and shining a spotlight through traditional media. Moreover, the development of a new generation of Champions for Children must be developed among policymakers in order to push forward much needed change.
- **Take Action:** When the moment comes for policymakers to choose, child advocates must set the

stage to make it easier for them to choose those solutions that best work for kids. This includes the need to mobilize partner organizations and grassroots citizen advocates. It also means turning up the pressure and/or support through various media options.

For the children, there is, as Manuel Pastor and his colleagues at USC have pointed out, great urgency to moving forward with this work. Without it, we are on a pathway to allow an entire generation of children to grow up in poverty, which will cost our nation billions of dollars in lost economic growth and wages and increased costs related to things such as higher rates of crime and poor health.⁹⁹

Without it, we are also on a path to further declines in funding dedicated to children. For example, the loss of just one percentage point in the federal share of spending dedicated to children will cost kids over \$40 billion annually. We must do better by our children or the next generation and our nation will suffer.

Second, we must embrace a vision that is built on the principles of equity and opportunity and that value each and every child in America – regardless of their race, gender, disability, income, zip code, or immigration status.

Third, such a vision must include lifting up children in those regions where outcomes are poorest, the minority population of children is highest, and where public support and effort may be the lowest. This argues for reaffirming the federal role of achieving equity and opportunity for all of our children. We cannot allow the children in certain states or localities to suffer just because the politics in that state are willing to leave its most vulnerable children by the wayside. Consequently, there remains a critically important role for the federal government to invest in kids in order to combat inequity and racial disparities in and between states.

Fourth, there is also an important role for the nation's courts to continue to play in affirming basic fairness and rights of children. As examples, courts across the country have issued rulings that are requiring states to address education funding and equity, reduce juvenile incarceration, and improve child welfare systems. Courts have also issued rulings that have overturned punitive immigration laws and the forced detention of women and children seeking refugee status in this country. Appendix A also highlights New Jersey as an outlier among high racial generation gap states that have high effort in terms of funding their education systems. As David Sciarra of the Education Law Center points out, the “landmark *Abbott v. Burke* rulings” were a catalyst for New Jersey becoming “one of a handful of states that has eliminated the funding gap between the highest and lowest poverty school districts **and** between the highest and lowest minority districts.”¹⁰⁰

Fifth, as a society, we must confront two very different visions of what it means to “Make America Great.” On the one hand, there is a vision articulated by Donald Trump that is focused on walls, separation, mass deportation, and generational warfare. Columnist Michael Gerson describes it as a War on America's Demography.¹⁰¹

But, it is worse than that and child advocates must engage in the debate because, with one in four of our nation's children living in immigrant families, punitive measures directed at immigrants will disproportionately harm children.¹⁰² For example, Trump's call for repeal of birthright citizenship negatively impacts one specific demographic group: children. In fact, those harmed would be babies who are U.S. citizen children of immigrants but such a radical policy change would also negatively impact all children born in America.¹⁰³

An alternative vision would embrace the nation's diversity, build bridges to close the racial generation gap, and make the conscious and wise choice to invest in its children. Another New Yorker, Governor Mario Cuomo, endorsed this more inclusive vision in a speech he delivered 23 years ago in Madison Square Garden. Cuomo was speaking to how our nation needed to lift children out of despair and violence and give them hope. As he said:

They are not my children, perhaps. Perhaps they are not your children, either. But, they are our children. We should love them.

But even if we could choose not to love them, we would still need them to be sound and productive. Because they are the nation's future.¹⁰⁴

Appendix

		Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Rankings		
		Highest Ranked States	Medium Tier States	Lowest Ranked States
Racial Generation Gap	Low	Iowa (C) Maine (A) New Hampshire (A) North Dakota (F) Utah (F) Vermont (A) Wyoming (B)	Hawaii (D) Idaho (F) Indiana (C) Michigan (B) Missouri (C) Montana (C) Ohio (B)	Kentucky (C) West Virginia (A)
	Medium	Kansas (B) Maryland (A)	Alaska (C) New York (A)	Alabama (C) Arkansas (B)

		Massachusetts (C) Minnesota (C) Nebraska (C) Virginia (D) Wisconsin (B)	Pennsylvania (A) South Dakota (F)	Louisiana (F) Mississippi (B) South Carolina (A) Tennessee (F)
	High	Connecticut (A) New Jersey (A)	Colorado (F) Delaware (F) Illinois (B) Oregon (F) Rhode Island (A) Washington (F)	Arizona (F) California (F) Florida (F) Georgia (C) Nevada (F) New Mexico (C) North Carolina (F) Oklahoma (F) Texas (D)

Notes: The letter by the state names is their effort grade from the Education Law Center.¹⁰⁵ Among the 17 states with the highest racial generation gap, there are nine in the lowest tier of states ranked by child outcomes due to poorer effort than most other states, on average. In contrast, there are just two states with a high racial generation gap (Connecticut and New Jersey) and a high ranking for child outcomes. Both of those states received an “A” for education effort. In the case of New Jersey, a legal strategy of pursuing education adequacy and equity through the court system has been instrumental in reaching this outcome.

Kentucky and West Virginia are the other outliers in the chart. These two states are more homogeneous and have better effort, on average, than other low-performing states. However, as poor states in Appalachia, they simply cannot overcome high poverty and lack of resources to pull themselves out of the lower tier of states in terms of outcomes for children.

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