



Connecticut Association for Human Services
110 Bartholomew Avenue · Suite 4030
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
www.cahs.org

Casey McGuane, President
James P. Horan, Executive Director
860.951.2212
860.951.6511 fax

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Testimony Before the Achievement Gap Taskforce Concerning Two Generation Program Planning

Good Morning Dr. Cardona and Members of the Achievement Gap Taskforce,

I am Elizabeth Fraser, a policy analyst for the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS is a statewide, non-profit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

I am here today to express support for the inclusion of a two- generation learning proposal in *The Master Plan to Eliminate the Achievement Gap*. Given Connecticut data, we believe that a two generation strategy is not only warranted, but necessary if we are ever to fully address the achievement gap.

The prevalence of parents lacking high school and post- secondary education in Connecticut is striking. *The United States Census , American Fact Finder* estimates that from 2010-2012 approximately 5,000 babies were born in Connecticut each year to a mother who had not yet completed high school.¹ An additional 8,500 babies were born to a mother who did not have any post -secondary education. Many of these parents are single and are struggling financially. Lack of educational credentials, coupled with the scarcity and expense of quality infant/ toddler care, offer a limited scenario for sustainable employment opportunities. Parents experience the stress and instability of poverty, which in turn has a direct effect on children. In addition, many of these parents have had both social and academic difficulties and /or language barriers throughout their own education. The scars from these past experiences can unintentionally be transferred to the next generation. It is no wonder that the cycle of generational poverty continues, unchecked.

Our Connecticut data shows that there is a need for a strategy around two- gen models that will ultimately lead to expansion of programs throughout Connecticut:

- 50% of women head of households with young children who have less than a high school education are not working
- 32% of women with children under 5 years old living under 200% of FPL do not have a HS diploma.
- 25 % of Hispanic women with young children have less than a high school diploma. Compared to 3.2% of white women ²

¹ *The United States Census , American Fact Finder*: Table 13014: Women 15-50 years Who Had a Birth in The Last 12 Months By Marital Status and Educational Attainment

² (ACS 2012 3 Year IPUMS data)

Comprehensive, two-generation learning models address the challenges faced by these fragile families. Programs are built on three concepts:

- the importance of education for parent and child,
- the economic supports needed to be successful toward goals,
- the building of social capital in the context of the individual parent, the family and the community.

Each is deemed an important link toward educational achievement and family resilience.³

To reach positive outcomes, two generation models also address the importance of mentoring parents towards positive parent/child attachments. Susan B. Neuman, in her book, *Changing the Odds for Children at Risk*, discusses the importance of giving fragile families the support they might need in their role as parents. She finds that “compelling evidence exists to show that applying what we know about beneficial parenting to intervention efforts can radically improve outcomes for children.”⁴

In the context of assessment, two generation models must measure outcomes across the family, not in the context of just children, (Early Head Start) or just adults, (adult education). Outcomes should be realized in the short and long term. In the short term, parents become engaged in their own learning toward their educational goals and meaningful employment. Children are receiving a strong start in quality programs and those with suspected developmental delays are identified early. In the long term, families are more stable, infants and toddlers are transitioned into quality preschool programs and most important, parents take an active role in their child’s educational progress. As research shows, a parent’s involvement in their child’s education is directly correlated to the success of the child.⁵

Nationally, the role and importance of two generation programs is getting much attention. Ascend, an arm of The Aspen Institute, The W. K. Kellogg Foundation and The Annie E. Casey Foundation are all espousing the benefits of integrating “two-generational” programs into the system of supports available for vulnerable families. At the 2013 Aspen Institute *Forum on Innovations in Early Childhood*, Carla Thomson of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation stated, “We see a Two generation Strategy as part of the work. The lens is families and children. We’re thinking two- gen because children don’t live outside the context of their families.

In Connecticut, we are fortunate to have an intensive two generation program model that is currently in place. . Connecticut Even Start programs have operating in Connecticut since 1996.

The Even Start program model addresses two generation core concepts through five inter-connected components.⁶ The three Connecticut programs provide education for both parent and child **and** provide a portal to the supports and community programs needed for family stabilization. Programs build on, but do not duplicate available services. A parenting education component ensures that parents have access to the information and tools needed to become a partner in their child’s

³ (Ascend, 2014)

⁴ Neuman, Susan B.:*Changing the Odds for Children at Risk*: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2009

⁵ Wesleyan Community Research Seminar, Even Stat Family Literacy Program Evaluation; *Measuring Parental Involvement in Education*, Spring 2009

⁶ (Appendix A)

education. Social Capital is built through mentored parent /child engagement activities, facilitated peer support and community connections.

Program objectives, collected monthly and measured twice yearly, specify that programs must address and *be accountable* for:

- parents outcomes toward their educational goals
- child outcomes toward strong developmental growth
- growth in Parenting Towards Literacy , measuring positive parenting influence on children's lives

Unfortunately, due to size limitations and lack of funding, the programs in existence do not address the vast need in Connecticut. There are currently only 3 of the original 11 remaining, Middletown, Torrington and New London. The Even Start Coalition (with input and guidance from the OEC , SDE and independent consultants and CAHS) has been working on a strategic planning model that would push two-generation programs forward and secure a more intentional place in Connecticut's future educational system. A draft report, written by Judy Goldfarb, an educational consultant, is in progress and includes longitudinal information gathered by programs and analyzed by The Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis. Recommendations for future work are included in the report. However, this project is far from complete. More time and resources are necessary to inform the process of developing sound policy.

CAHS recognizes that a foundation must be laid to effect change, promote two generation policies and increase access to programs. Moving forward, we have added two generation strategy work to our policy agenda. We are taking steps to address the need to define and promote this concept.

In particular, two of the reported recommendations are of significance to the mission of CAHS. The first is to change the focus of two -generation learning from a purely literacy approach to one that connects educational achievement to employment goals. This is a shift in the definition of two- gen strategies in Connecticut that needs to be developed and acted on. The second is to find the means, through grants or state funding, to continue this work on a larger scale.

CAHS is committed to playing an active role in the two generation planning process. We believe that in order to implement, expand and sustain two- generation strategies that align childcare and workforce policies, a statewide effort developed by a broad coalition of state and local leaders is imperative.

Now is the time to grow the concept of two- generational programs by providing direction, access and hope too many more families across the state. By doing so, Connecticut will be on the forefront of a national movement towards two- generation learning and will begin to tackle the root causes of the achievement gap.