

## Seniors4Kids: African American Pre-K Children and Families in Kentucky

### Introduction

African American families in Kentucky are a vibrant and resilient part of the social landscape. Many African American families, both in Kentucky and nationally, have received less of the benefits of economic prosperity, and face the challenge of cumulative disadvantage in their families and communities. Studies on cumulative disadvantage have found that early disadvantages lead to risks later in life, while conversely, early advantage leads to additional advantage.<sup>1</sup> It is important for community organizations to understand the economic challenges facing African American families in Kentucky in order to offer early intervention to build on the strengths and resources of families and communities. Older adults looking for civic engagement opportunities are often underutilized resources and can make significant contributions to the well-being of children, families, and communities. One way for older adults to make a significant impact on their communities is through advocacy and volunteer work for high-quality pre-K education.

### African American Families in Kentucky

African American families have a special stake in the availability of quality pre-K programs in Kentucky. Census data from 2006 shows that in Kentucky there are disproportionately higher levels of poverty and lower levels of educational attainment among African Americans than people who are non-Hispanic White. In Kentucky, African Americans make up 9 percent of 3 and 4 year olds. Eighty-eight percent of African American 3 and 4 year olds attending pre-K attend a public program compared to 56 percent of white children the same age. The high rate of use of these means-based public programs speaks to the disparity in socioeconomic status between African American and non-Hispanic White children. Recently, the income eligibility criterion for the Kentucky Preschool Program was raised from 130 percent of the federal poverty level to 150 percent of the federal poverty level. This extends the eligibility to more children in Kentucky, and highlights the importance of a concentrated outreach and advocacy campaign. Generations United has identified the availability of high quality pre-K programming because of the potential it presents for positive change.

### What is Seniors4Kids?

Generation United's Seniors4Kids is a statewide initiative that bridges the generations by raising the visibility of older adults in support of high quality pre-K education. By encouraging the involvement of older adults, the initiative is creating statewide networks of community leaders and grassroots volunteers with the common goal of securing quality education for all children.

### Seniors4Kids:

- Generates media stories and opinion pieces, particularly letters to the editor that spotlight the need for quality pre-K.



*Photo: Shari Augins*

*Bertha Bates, a long time Foster Grandparent volunteer, loves to go to the classroom and assist children in learning how to read.*

- Identifies and trains Captains for Kids, older adults who serve as on-the-ground advocates responsible for recruiting and engaging older adults.
- Educates policy makers on the benefits of quality pre-K programs.

### Older Adults as a Resource

Americans over the age of 65 volunteer more time, an average of 96 hours per year, than any other segment of the population and are often the most reliable and committed volunteers.<sup>2</sup> The estimated dollar value of the volunteer time of older adults through volunteer activities and time spent caring for family members in 2000 was equivalent to 239 billion dollars.<sup>3</sup> Thirty-five percent of older adults reported working with children and youth as their favorite volunteer activity.<sup>4</sup> One of the goals of Seniors4Kids is to leverage some of this time toward supporting high-quality pre-K programming in Kentucky.

### The Benefits of Early Childhood Education

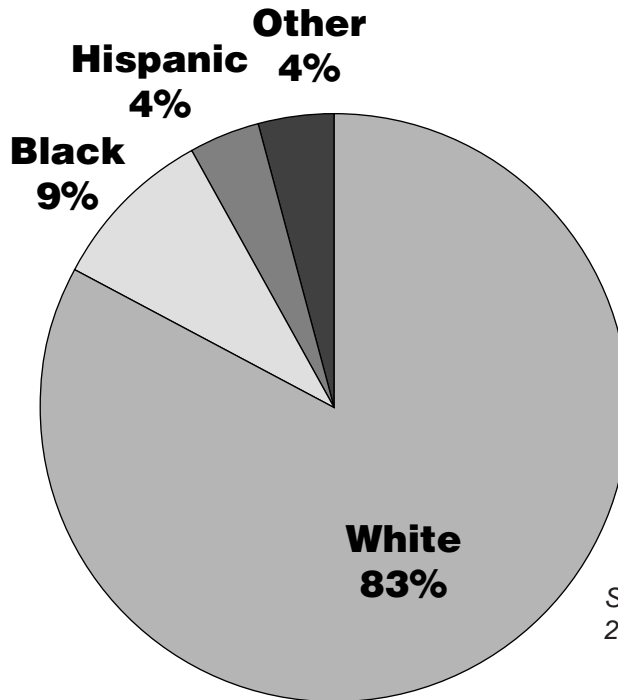
Pre-K programs are a cost effective intervention, with children who attended pre-K achieving higher employment rates and better earnings than those who did not.<sup>5</sup> Followed over time, children who attended pre-K also committed less crime and showed less anti-social behaviors than those who did not.<sup>6</sup> Pre-K results in savings by reducing the need for remedial special education, welfare, and criminal justice services.<sup>7</sup> Early childhood education presents a unique opportunity to offset the harmful effects of cumulative disadvantage and to set the children of Kentucky on a successful trajectory.

Benefits of early childhood education:

- Fewer referrals for remedial classes or special education.
- Preschool graduates were less likely to repeat grades.

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## Children 3 and 4 Years Old in Kentucky



*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Population Estimates*

Enrollment of 3 and 4 year olds in preschool	Black		White, not Hispanic	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Children ages 3 and 4	10,687	100%	91,757	100%
Enrolled in nursery school/preschool	3,634	34%	35,951	39%
<b>Type of pre-K attended</b>				
Enrolled in nursery school/preschool	3,634	100%	35,951	100%
Public school	3,198	88%	20,300	56%
Private school	436	12%	15,651	44%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 Population Estimates and 2006 American Community Survey*

## BLACK AND NON-HISPANIC WHITE POPULATIONS OF KENTUCKY

Population by Sex and Age	Black		White, not Hispanic	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Both sexes, all ages	326,930	100.00%	3,732,220	100.00%
Both sexes, 3 and 4 years old	10,719	3.28%	92,264	2.47%
Male, all ages	160,015	48.94%	1,822,005	48.82%
Male, 3 and 4 years old	5,386	1.65%	47,173	1.26%
Female, all ages	166,915	51.06%	1,910,215	51.18%
Female, 3 and 4 years old	5,333	1.63%	45,091	1.21%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Population Estimates*

<b>Households and Families by Type</b>	<b>Black</b>		<b>White, not Hispanic</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Households	122,975	100%	1,476,076	100%
Married-couple families	31,364	26%	775,254	53%
Married-couple families, children under 5	5,032	4%	125,580	9%
Single-parent families, children under 5	12,927	11%	42,330	3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

<b>Poverty Status of Families by Type</b>	<b>Black</b>		<b>White, not Hispanic</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Married-couple families	31,364	100%	775,254	100%
Below poverty level	2,264	7%	54,118	7%
Families with children under 5				
Married-couple families	5,032	100%	125,580	100%
Below poverty level	440	9%	14,810	12%
Single-parent families	12,927	100%	42,330	100%
Below poverty level	7,414	57%	22,566	53%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

<b>Employment Status by Sex</b>	<b>Black</b>		<b>White, not Hispanic</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Males, 16 to 64 yrs	100,921	100%	1,429,983	100%
In civilian labor force	67,664	67%	917,088	64%
Employed	58,722	58%	856,163	60%
Unemployed	8,942	9%	60,925	4%
Females, 16 to 64 yrs	105,927	100%	1,537,790	100%
In civilian labor force	75,899	72%	809,397	53%
Employed	66,986	63%	756,184	49%
Unemployed	8,913	8%	53,213	3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

### **Median Earnings by Sex of Workers Employed Full-Time, Year Round**

	<b>Black</b>	<b>White, not Hispanic</b>
Males, 16 yrs and over	\$32,440	\$40,498
Females, 16 yrs and over	\$25,975	\$29,788

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

Educational Attainment by Sex	Black		White, not Hispanic	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Males, 25 yrs and over	85,870	100%	1,208,423	100%
Less than high school diploma	18,298	21%	261,591	21%
High school diploma	33,502	39%	427,767	35%
Some college or associate's degree	22,890	27%	271,125	22%
Bachelor's or graduate degree	11,180	13%	247,940	21%
Females, 25 yrs and over	96,696	100%	1,326,985	100%
Less than high school diploma	18,590	20%	251,660	19%
High school diploma	35,157	36%	453,700	34%
Some college or associate's degree	29,838	31%	357,526	27%
Bachelor's or graduate degree	13,111	14%	264,099	20%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

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- Preschool graduates achieve higher grades.
- More frequent high school graduation/GED completion.
- Greater academic motivation, on-task behavior, capacity for independent work, and time spent on homework.
- Preschool graduates had higher aspirations for their futures than non-participants and were more likely to enroll in post-secondary programs.
- Higher employment rates and better earnings.<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion

Seniors support strong pre-K because of the numerous benefits to children, families, older adults, and society as a whole. Research has shown that pre-K helps disadvantaged children academically, socially, and for a lifetime. It further benefits all of us by creating a more capable workforce who contribute taxes and consequently to the nation's fiscal balance and the solvency of social security. Older adults are promoting the many benefits of pre-K and advocating for increased access and quality. With more available time, experiences, and a strong desire to "give back", adults age 50 and older are mobilizing the widespread bipartisan support and championing the cause. Their efforts are needed to promote policy changes that will ensure high-quality pre-K for all children. For additional information about Generations United's Seniors4Kids, visit [www.seniors4kids.org](http://www.seniors4kids.org)

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**generations  
united**

Because we're stronger together

*Generations United (GU) is the national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. GU represents more than 100 national, state, and local organizations and individuals representing more than 70 million Americans. Since 1986, GU has served as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. GU acts as a catalyst for stimulating collaboration between aging, children, and youth organizations providing a forum to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation.*

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, G. J., & Johnson. Cumulative disadvantage theory and contingent work: Race and gender comparisons. I. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (December 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Volunteering in the United States, 2005. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.

<sup>3</sup> Independent Sector (2007). Giving and Volunteering in the United States. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>4</sup> Hart, Peter. The New Face of Retirement. San Francisco, CA: Civic Ventures. Accessed January 28, 2008 at [http://civicventures.org/publications/surveys/new\\_face\\_of\\_retirement/2002.cfm](http://civicventures.org/publications/surveys/new_face_of_retirement/2002.cfm)

<sup>5</sup> Stallings, J.A.; and Stipek, D. "Research on Early Childhood and Elementary School Teaching Programs." In Handbook of Research on Teaching. Third Ed. Edited by M.C. Wittrock. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen Galinsky Families and Work Institute. The Economic Benefits of High-Quality Early Childhood Programs: What Makes the Difference? 2006. The Committee for Economic Development.

<sup>7</sup> Pre-K Now. Fact Sheet: The Benefits of High Quality Pre-K. Washington, DC: Pre-K Now. Accessed January 28, 2008 at <http://www.preknow.org/advocate/factsheets/benefits.cfm>

<sup>8</sup> Schweinhart, L.J. Early Childhood Development Programs in the Eighties: The National Picture. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Early Childhood Policy Papers, No. 1, 1985. (ED 262 902)