

Action Step Fact Sheet 2005 Children's Agenda



Foundation Priority

Promote the health and well-being of all NH children by supporting:

- a) a state budget that improves investments in children and families and,
- b) state funding for a quality public education for every child

What is the specific concern or issue affecting NH's children?

Over the past six years, the New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network has created an annual Children's Agenda—setting concrete goals for policy and budget commitments at the state and local level to promote child health and well being. In each agenda, we have stressed the connections between healthy children, healthy families and communities and a healthy economy. We have promoted a policy agenda that addresses all aspects of children's lives-- building bipartisan support for state and local initiatives that invest in children as a part of an overall strategy for state economic development.

Sound investments in children and families are not just the right thing to do, they are the smart thing to do. Research shows that investment in high quality early care and education programs can yield returns of up to 700%.^{1,2} A 10% reduction in child poverty in New Hampshire could have an economic impact of \$73 million annually.³ Preventing one overnight in a hospital would save more than the cost of all well child visits for one child, from birth until age eighteen.⁴

Why then does New Hampshire continue to struggle to fund universal kindergarten, let alone universal prekindergarten? Why then does our state spend less on public education per pupil than more than 1/2 of the states in our nation, earning national attention from Education Week for having one of the country's widest gaps between per pupil funding in rich and poor towns?⁵

Part of the answer lies in a failure to integrate long-term planning and capital investment into our biannual budget process. Every other year, our state creates a budget that governs expenditures in critical health, education and economic development arenas. Yet this budget process is divorced from the kind of longer term financial planning critical to the health of any organization. Is universal kindergarten expensive? Sure. And if you look only at a two-year budget cycle, you might conclude it is too expensive. Step back, however, and consider the long term consequences of failing to provide kindergarten, and you would definitely come to a different bottom line.

Research shows that early intervention could save between \$1.7 million and \$3.5 million over the course of a child's life.⁶ Our future prosperity depends on our investments today—investments necessary to ensure healthy children, a prepared workforce and successful families.

What are the action step strategies to address this issue?

Support a state budget that improves investments in children and families and state funding for a quality public education for every child by:

- Connecting the dots between sound programs for children today and economic success for the state tomorrow;
- Raising a powerful voice for public investments in children at the state and federal levels;

- Keeping informed of the budget process, attending relevant public hearings, and disseminating information via the weekly NH CAN Updates
- Calling NH CAN partners to action through timely Action Alerts

How does this meet NH CAN's prioritizing criteria?

◆ **How many children are affected?**

Approximately 310,000 children live in New Hampshire. All of those children are entitled to an adequate education, and all of those children need some or all of the direct and indirect services provided by state government.

◆ **What is the severity of the impact?**

The needs of New Hampshire's children and the services the state provides to address these needs are great:

- In New Hampshire, 8% of children under the age of 5 are living in poverty.⁷
- Living in a household headed by a single female greatly increases the chances a child will grow up in poverty; 45% of children under five living with a single mother live in poverty.⁸
- The number of families receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) in March 2003 was 6,321, a 2.8% increase from March 2002.⁹
- On any given day 1,000 of the state's school children are homeless.¹⁰
- The Division for Children, Youth and Families assessed over 14,000 children for possible child abuse or neglect in 2003.¹¹
- Over 65,000 children rely on Healthy Kids for their health insurance.¹²
- Each month, over 7,000 children need child care assistance from the state to allow their parents to work or go to school.¹³
- New Hampshire ranks 24th among the 50 states in percent of children dropping out of high school.¹⁴

Both state-based and national researchers report that state funding for education is grossly inadequate and inequitable.

- The *Fund The Gap* report discovered an average gap of \$2,125 per student, or \$425 million statewide between the funding the state sends to local school districts and the cost of implementing basic state educational requirements. In some communities, the gap exceeds \$5,000 per pupil.¹⁵
- While a national report found that New Hampshire's overall spending on schools was 29th highest in the country during the 2001-02 school year, an average of \$7,571 per pupil, spending was uneven across the state. The report gave NH a grade of "D" in equity because the state had one of the country's widest gaps between rich and poor districts. The disparities result from a high reliance on local property taxes for school funding, as wealth varies from community to community.¹⁶

◆ **What is NH CAN's unique ability to create or influence change?**

NH CAN has a strong network of nearly 200 organizations and advisors, all of whom have a stake in the outcome of this year's budget process. By working together, NH CAN will raise a collective voice for investments in children and keeping children's needs above the bottom line. Through NH CAN, advocates connect the dots between investments in children and future payoffs – such as investments in early childhood education and reductions in juvenile crime or investments in child health insurance and improvements in school performance. NH CAN is the only statewide

advocacy network for children that provides a place for advocates with diverse priorities to work together to improve the overall health and well-being of children. This strength gives NH CAN the political clout necessary to create and influence change in New Hampshire.

REFERENCES

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- ³ *The Bottom Line: Kids Count to New Hampshire's Future*, Children's Alliance of New Hampshire, Fall 2001
- ⁴ *You Can't Spend a Better Dollar: The Children's Health Insurance Program is a Great Investment*, New Hampshire Healthy Kids Corporation, 2002. <http://www.nhhealthykids.com/NHHKGreatInvest/better%20dollar%202002.pdf>
- ⁵ *Quality Counts 2005: No Small Change: Targeting Money Toward Student Performance*, Education Week, January 6, 2005, online at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/06/17sos-nh.h24.html>
- ⁶ *Minnesota Youth "ACE" Intervention Program*, Carrie McVicker, Child Welfare League of America, online at <http://www.cwla.org/programs/r2p/cvarticlesmn.htm>
- ⁷ *New Hampshire's Children 2004*, Child Welfare League of America, online at <http://cwla.org/advocacy/statefactsheets/2004/newhampshire.pdf>
- ⁸ *Kids Count New Hampshire 2003*; Children's Alliance of New Hampshire
- ⁹ *New Hampshire's Children 2004*, Child Welfare League of America, online at <http://cwla.org/advocacy/statefactsheets/2004/newhampshire.pdf>
- ¹⁰ NH Department of Education, annual one day count, 2003.
- ¹¹ "Prevalence/Trends of Child Abuse and Neglect in New Hampshire," presentation by Nancy Rollins to the Children and Family Law Committee, April 15, 2004.
- ¹² NH Healthy Kids Corp.
- ¹³ NH Child Development Bureau, August 2004
- ¹⁴ *Kids Count Databook 2004*; Annie E. Casey Foundation
- ¹⁵ *Fund the Gap*, Citizen's Voice Project, online at <http://www.nhcvp.org/fundgap.php>
- ¹⁶ *Quality Counts 2005: No Small Change: Targeting Money Toward Student Performance*, Education Week, January 6, 2005, online at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/06/17sos-nh.h24.html>