Securing America’s Future
Children and the 2014 Elections

What Candidates, Child Advocates and Voters Need to Know and Do About Key Child Policy Issues

July 2014
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## About this Guide

This guide was produced by the Child and Family Policy Center for use by child advocacy organizations, including members of the Iowa Children’s Policy Coalition and the Partnership for America’s Children.

The Iowa Children’s Policy Coalition is a group of 32 organizations committed to raising children’s issues in state and federal campaigns.

The Partnership for America’s Children is a network of 56 state and community child-advocacy organizations in 44 states and the District of Columbia. These organizations are active representing children and their needs in communities and state capitols. They also recognize the critical role the federal government plays in the future of children.

The collective vision of these nonpartisan, multi-issue child advocacy organizations is to improve the lives of all children though public policies to ensure equity and diversity, child health, school readiness, school success, child safety and family stability and economic security.

CFPC is a member of the Partnership for America’s Children and provides bridge staffing and facilitation support. The Partnership is governed by a board representing the diversity of Partnership membership.

This guide does not cover all the important child issues Congress and its members must address, but it does provide descriptions of the major federal policies of concern to those with an interest in the well-being of America’s children.

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Our children bring us together around our aspirations for the future. Across political affiliations, we all want our children to grow into productive adults equipped to lead the nation. Whether we come from a red state or a blue state, we want to leave our children a future that energizes their potential.

Federal (and state and community) lawmakers ultimately should be judged in no small part by how well they advance these aspirations.

At the same time, many of us are not entirely clear on the federal government’s current role in ensuring the health, safety, education, security and opportunity for the next generation—let alone where candidates stand on these issues.

Policies focused on children often receive little discussion by voters, candidates or the media during election season.

This is not because candidates and the public do not care about these issues.

They do.

But child policy issues often do not lend themselves to simple sound bites. They are not considered “hot button” issues that shape campaigns.

The result is that the pressing needs of children have not been the subject of the type of political discourse required in a democracy to reach consensus and take action.

This guide is developed to elevate that discourse. It is based on the belief that raising child policy to greater prominence in elections, particularly Congressional elections, is a way to re-orient our political process toward common concerns and practical solutions.

There is no such thing as “benign neglect” of children and their future. This guide offers a starting point for raising children’s issues during the 2014 elections. Part One describes the current federal role in key child policy areas and the issues that will be before the next Congress. Part Two describes actions that candidates, child advocates and voters can take to ensure that discourse.

This guide is based on the belief that raising child policy to greater prominence in elections is a way to re-orient our political process toward common concerns and practical solutions.
What is the federal role in child policy?

Congress convenes each year to address issues of domestic and national security. This includes defense, environmental regulation, economic policy, and the safety and security and health of Americans.

While some specific policies define legal rights and obligations that are independent of the federal budget, most—particularly those about safety, health and economic security—are reflected in the federal budget.

The pie chart at right provides an overview of the total federal budget and the funding it directs to children and families.

Investments in children represent only 10 percent of the budget (voter opinion polls show support for a much greater share). But these investments are critically important, particularly for vulnerable children across the country. While not contributors to federal budget deficits, investments in children also can be the most vulnerable to cutbacks.

The federal budget, primarily through grants and partnerships with states, provides 35 percent of total state, federal, and local school investments in children (see appendix for more detail).

The federal budget provides a major share of investments in the following areas, each of which is discussed individually in Part One of this guide.

More than half of all public (federal, state and local) investments in children’s HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT & nutrition.

Half of all public investments in EARLY LEARNING and development programs to prepare children for school.

Almost half of all public investments in SAFETY & PERMANENCE to keep children safe from harm and bring permanency to their lives if parents cannot do so.

Over four-fifths of all investments in family ECONOMIC SECURITY to ensure the essential needs of children are met.
Part One: The Issues

Healthy Development

Why does it matter?

Healthy development is key to children’s educational, social and economic success. Although children are not a major driver of current health care costs, many chronic adult-health conditions that drive costs have their roots in childhood and can be prevented by improving health trajectories in childhood.

The first step to good health is ensuring children have health insurance coverage and a regular source of care. Beyond that, children need comprehensive primary and preventive health services and good nutrition.

What is the federal role today?

As health costs have risen dramatically over the last two decades, family health coverage through employers has become increasingly difficult for employers to offer and families to afford. The federal government has expanded its role in providing health coverage for lower-income children without employer coverage and helped reduce the proportion of children who are not insured from 14 percent in 1995 to 9 percent in 2011.

The federal government provides support for child health and nutrition in the following ways:

- Medicaid and the state child health insurance program (CHIP) provide health coverage to approximately 29 million low-income U.S. children, more than two in five of all children in the country.
- The Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program provides nutritional counseling and food supplements to pregnant women and young children; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food stamps for low-income families with children; and child nutrition programs provide support for school lunch, breakfast and summer programs.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health and Institute of Medicine sponsor research and disseminate effective practices on health overall, including child health.

What does the public want from Congress?

Public opinion polling has consistently shown strong support for providing health care for children and for a greater emphasis on preventive health services for children:

- Voters rank “providing health care for poor children” as one of the very top responsibilities for government.

Many chronic adult health conditions have their roots in childhood and can be prevented by improving health trajectories starting in the earliest years.

Percent of children insured by type of coverage, 1995-2011

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Numbers total more than 100 percent because children may have both private and government coverage. The decline in private coverage from 2000-11 in large part reflects increased costs of employer-sponsored family coverage. The average annual premium for such coverage rose from $6,438 to $15,073 during the period, according to Kaiser Family Foundation surveys.
• Voters believe more emphasis should be placed by lawmakers on prevention and health promotion activities to ensure children with a strong and healthy start in life

• Support further actions to address the twin problems of childhood obesity and child malnutrition

**Issues for the next Congress**

The next Congress has the following child health responsibilities and opportunities:

• Extend federal funding for CHIP beyond 2015 and address the expiring provisions from the Reauthorization Act of 2007, including express lane eligibility and quality measures and demonstrations

• Emphasize healthy child development and prevention and child health promotion efforts within federal research, demonstration and health grants to states to improve health and reduce health costs

**Starting the Dialogue...**

**Questions for Voters and Advocates to Ask and Candidates to Address**

Two in every five children now receive their health coverage through Medicaid and CHIP, jointly financed by the federal government and state governments. The rate of child health coverage has increased as a result of these programs, but 9 percent of all U.S. children remain uninsured. Further, much of existing coverage is based on an adult health care model, while children are developing and need more preventive and developmental services. Additionally, the vulnerability of America’s children to poor health outcomes has increased and, for the first time in our country’s history, children face the prospect of growing up less healthy and living shorter lives than their parents.

Q. What actions will you promote for Congress to take to ensure all children have health coverage and that this coverage is effective in responding to their health needs?
Why does it matter?

It has been a quarter century since the nation’s governors, led by Bill Clinton, and President George H. Bush established the first national educational goal—all children will start school ready to learn. Since that time, both neuroscience and economics have shown the critical importance of the earliest years to lifelong learning and success. Investments in high-quality early-learning programs have demonstrated high rates of return. Setting a positive trajectory in the first years is crucial not only to educational success, but to health, social well-being, earnings as an adult and prevention of delinquency and crime. At the same time, research shows that as many as 40 percent of America’s children start school well behind what it expected for their age and, even with high quality K-12 education, have difficulty catching up.

What is the federal role today?

Each of the last four Presidents has supported increased federal investments in early childhood. Unlike the school-aged years, where most investments in children are made at the state and local level, the federal government provides a major share of funding directed to early-childhood development. For instance, the federal government invests in young children and their families through:

- Head Start, which provides preschool services to America’s lowest-income 3- and 4-year-olds
- Early Head Start, which provides early learning environments for very young children and their families

Although there are many different public programs supporting early learning, most, including those above, only serve only a small fraction of children who could benefit. The overall level of public (state, federal and school) investments in the earliest years remains a small fraction of what is invested in school-aged children.

| Per-child annual public investment in education and development by child age |
|---|---|---|
| Ages 0-2 | Ages 3-5 | Ages 6-18 |
| $10,000 | $8,000 | $6,000 |
| $8,000 | $6,000 | $4,000 |
| $6,000 | $4,000 | $2,000 |
| $4,000 | $2,000 | $0 |

What the public wants from Congress

Public opinion polling shows strong support—across gender, age, income and party affiliation—for additional public investments in the earliest learning years. While voters recognize that parents have the primary right and responsibility to raise their children, they also recognize parents cannot do it alone. Public opinion polls show that:

- Voters are very concerned about the next generation and want government to do more, not less, to invest in children so they “start school with the proper knowledge to succeed.”
- Voters see “ensuring children get a strong start” through investments in early learning is second only to jobs and economic growth as a national priority.
- Voters see Head Start and preschool as particularly effective programs deserving of greater public investment.

Issues for the next Congress

Like his predecessors, President Obama has called for greater federal investments in early learning. His specific proposal, Strong Start for America’s Children, would add an additional $10 billion in annual federal investments to the current $20 billion in federal investments in early-learning and development programs. That would increase federal investments by one-half, but, to put into context, would place total spending on early learning at less than 1 percent of the overall federal budget.

Congress must decide what actions it will take to:

- Reauthorize the Child Care Development Block grant (last reauthorized in 1997).
- Provide funding for existing early-learning programs as part of the 2015-6 federal budget, including Head Start, MIECHV, Part B and Part C of IDEA, TANF and CCDF.
- Respond to the Strong Start for America’s Children initiative and its recommendations for greater federal investments in early learning.

Starting the Dialogue...

Questions for Voters and Advocates to Ask and Candidates to Address

Too many American children start school behind and will never catch up. Gaps in development start early, but investments do not. Through a variety of programs, the federal government plays a much larger role in supporting early learning than it does supporting K-12 education. Still, with current state and federal investments, for every dollar invested in a school-aged child, only seven cents is invested in an infant or toddler and 25 cents in a preschooler. Research on brain development, early childhood adversity and toxic stress all point to the birth-to-5 years as absolutely foundational to educational success through the school years and into adulthood.

Q. What actions will you promote for Congress to take to close the “readiness gap” that appears before kids start school and accounts for so much of student underachievement and future educational, social and economic problems?
Why does it matter?
Particularly in the first years of life, exposure to violence, abuse and neglect can have lifelong consequences. Research on resiliency, toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) points to the critical importance of family stability and safety for healthy child development. Children who are removed from parental care for reasons of abuse or neglect still need people in their lives who are family to them and they can rely on. Unfortunately, too many children who are removed from their parents experience many moves from foster setting to foster setting as they grow up and end up disconnected from community and family supports.

The foster care system currently serves over 400,000 of the country’s most vulnerable children, and the larger child protective service system responds to approximately 2 million reports of child abuse or neglect each year. If these children are not kept safe in their homes or provided permanence through family preservation, adoption or other stability in care, they experience extremely high rates of school failure, human trafficking, depression and other mental illness, and are more likely to experience homelessness and disconnection as adults.

What is the federal role today?
Since 1935, the federal government has provided support to states to develop child welfare programs, and since 1974 has established additional funding to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect. In recent years, the federal government has provided more emphasis on preventive services to strengthen families who are under the stress that leads to abuse and neglect and to support kinship care and adoption when children cannot return to their families. Despite a growing emphasis on strengthening families who are under stress, the majority share of federal funding is for placement rather than prevention services.

Specifically, the federal government provides funding to states through:

- Title IV-e of the Social Security Act for maintenance payments for children in foster care, for subsidized adoptions, and for select services which can prevent placement
- Title IV-b of the Social Security Act for other foster care and prevention services
- Medicaid (largely by state determination) for a variety of treatment services to address mental health concerns
- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) block grant for other state services to prevent and treat child abuse.

What the public wants from Congress
Voters consistently rate government’s role in “protecting children from abuse and neglect” as at the very top of its responsibilities (although this is not necessarily translated into specific policy positions on how to achieve this end). There also is very strong support for the rights of parents to determine how to raise their children and of the dangers of government intruding on these roles.

Voters also believe that older youth in the system should have a greater voice in their own permanency planning. Associations of foster and former foster youth in several states have helped to define and advocate for changes that provide for that involvement and give those youth support and contact with peers.
Issues for the next Congress

While Congress has made many revisions, through different reauthorizations, to federal programs serving this vulnerable population, the basic financing for foster care through Title IV-e is outdated. It currently serves some states much better than others, particularly those states with more financial resources to match federal funding. While federal funding sets objectives for states in providing for safety, permanency and well-being, almost all states fall short in achieving permanency and well-being for the children in their protective service systems, who remain the most vulnerable children in society. Moreover, particularly in Midwestern and northern industrial states, there are huge overrepresentations of children of color within child protective service and foster care systems.

Starting the Dialogue...

Questions for Voters and Advocates to Ask and Candidates to Address

In 2013, there were 681,000 children found by state child protective service systems to be victims of maltreatment, and 400,000 children in foster care. Since the establishment of the Social Security Act in 1935, the federal government has partnered with states to develop child welfare services to prevent or respond to child abuse and neglect and to provide for the safety, permanence, and well-being of children who are removed from home. Despite such attention, too many children enter and remain in foster care and do not have permanency in their lives, and 30,000 children age out of foster care annually without permanent connections and with major barriers to success. The current federal financing system provides much greater emphasis on placement than prevention.

Q. What actions will you promote for Congress to take to reduce the number of children who are subject to abuse and neglect, improve foster care, and ensure a promising future for those leaving care?
Why does it matter?

Children cannot provide for themselves. They need their families to meet their essential needs for food, shelter and health care and to make investments in their future. While many families with limited means go to great lengths and provide stability and opportunity for their children, the simple fact is that poverty remains a major risk factor and is often indicative of other forms of deprivation or marginalization that jeopardize healthy growth and development.

Today, children are the age group most likely to live in poverty. Since the start of the War on Poverty in 1965, poverty among seniors has declined by nearly 70 percent, while poverty among children has risen. While it may not be possible to eliminate poverty among children overnight, it is possible to reduce the impacts poverty can have on children’s growth and healthy development.

What is the federal role today?

Medicare, Social Security and other pension programs have dramatically reduced senior poverty, but solutions to child poverty are much more complex. Federal and state governments continue to provide different types of assistance, such as subsidized housing, energy assistance and supplementary nutrition assistance (SNAP or food stamps) to help families get by, but these do not necessarily counter the impact on children of living in poverty.

As part of welfare reform in the 1990s, the federal government shifted from providing economic support to families with children when they stay at home to care for their children (Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or AFDC) to providing time-limited assistance to families as they seek and secure work (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF). This has dramatically reduced the number of children and families receiving “welfare assistance.” A large share of this funding has been redirected to child care for parents as they work. The federal earned income tax credit and child tax credit programs are now the largest poverty reduction programs in the country, based on supporting families who work but are earning low wages. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance to Needy Families (SNAP) program also is a much larger program than is TANF.

What the public wants from Congress

Voters are of two minds when it comes to poverty and children. Voters believe that the primary responsibility falls on parents to find employment or to delay child-bearing until they have the means to raise children. Voters also strongly believe that all children should have their basic needs met and be given the opportunity to succeed, even if their parents do not provide for this. Polls consistently show strong public concern for children growing

Since the War on Poverty, poverty among seniors has declined by nearly 70 percent, while poverty among children as risen.

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**Poverty rates by age group, 1966-2012**

![Graph showing poverty rates by age group, 1966-2012](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/people.html)
up in poverty, and a desire for government to do more, rather than less, to ensure that those children have stability in their lives and encouragement and opportunity to succeed.

and fatherhood initiatives that better ensure that children have two sources of economic and social support.

Issues for the next Congress

Since its establishment in 1996, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Children legislation has yet to be reauthorized, operating instead on continuing resolutions. Again in 2015, Congress will determine whether or not to make significant changes to TANF, in light of the changes in society over the last two decades. As Congress takes action on the overall budget, Congress must give particular attention to the impact those actions have on poor children and their families, and the opportunity of those children to be successful as they grow to adulthood. Of increasing interest in addressing poverty are two-generation strategies that take a long-term perspective to ending poverty, place-based strategies that focus attention on community-building strategies within very poor neighborhoods,

Starting the Dialogue...

Questions for Voters and Advocates to Ask and Candidates to Address

One in five American children live in poverty and more than twice that amount in low-income households that struggle to make ends meet. Children are the age group most likely to be poor. Poverty, particularly persistent poverty, is one of the strongest predictors of a child’s health, education, and social well-being. It is not poverty, per se, that produces these results. Children whose families lack economic stability and cannot invest in their children’s future also experience stress that compounds the barriers their children face in their growth and learning.

Q. What actions will you promote for Congress to take to reduce poverty among children or otherwise ensure that children from low income families have the resources and supports they need so they do not have barriers to success?
Why does it matter?

The United States is a nation rich in diversity and is becoming even more diverse, with children leading the way. Today, half of all children born in the United States are children of color. This is a source of both opportunity and challenge in an increasingly worldwide economy, where competition for higher skilled workers is coming from across the globe.

The future prosperity of the United States will be determined, in large measure, by how well we educate and support all our children. To do so, however, requires addressing what currently are large disparities in well-being among children across different racial and ethnic groups. The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s recent Race for Results report shows profound differences in child well-being by race, based on 12 indicators of well-being.

What the public wants from Congress

With legal changes, there also have been major changes in public opinion, with the vast majority of Americans of all races now believing that anti-discrimination laws should be strictly enforced and there should be equal opportunities for all, by race and gender. Voters remain uncomfortable talking about issues of race and discrimination, but they are broadly supportive of every child having equal opportunity for success.

While children do not vote, their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and planning-to-become-parents do. Children do bring Americans—across age, gender, race, party affiliation, and parenting and grand-parenting status—together in our aspirations for the future—that each and every child grows up in a society that supports, without prejudice or exclusion, that provides that the child opportunity to succeed.

What is the federal role today?

Federal policy has done much to end legal discrimination in all its forms—from anti-discrimination laws in education, employment and education to voting rights and rights to public accommodation.

A large share of federal funding is directed to children who otherwise would be disadvantaged—in terms of disability, income or educational status. The role of the federal government has been to ensure that children, regardless of where they live or the color of their skin, have the same opportunities to succeed.

Despite these actions, disparities remain.

The future prosperity of the U.S. will be determined, in large measure, by how well we educate and support all children.
Issues for the next Congress

The federal government provides guidance to states to ensure that investments in education, health, child welfare and other services contribute to reducing disparities—and are tracked and monitored to that end. How this guidance is provided is important to ensuring that issues of disparity and inequity are given the attention they deserve. Given the differences in both income and diversity levels across the 50 states, the federal government plays a key role in ensuring that children have the same basic opportunities for success wherever they live. This includes ensuring that funding formulas recognize the special needs within states and communities subject to rapid changes in growth and diversity.

Starting the Dialogue...

Questions for Voters and Advocates to Ask and Candidates to Address

The United States is becoming more diverse, and children are leading the way. As a land of many immigrants, diversity has been a source of strength and innovation in the past, and the tenets of American society are for inclusion and equal opportunity. In an increasingly world-wide economy, this diversity can be an additional source of strength. At the same time, there currently are profound disparities in child well-being—across measures of health, safety, economic security and school readiness and success—across racial and socio-economic lines that must be addressed for America’s future prosperity.

Q. What actions will you promote for Congress to take to ensure that all children have equal opportunities for success and close inequities that limit achieving that success?
Part Two:
What Candidates, Child Advocates and Voters Can Do

What Congressional Candidates Can Do

Public-opinion polls consistently show that children and child issues rank high on voter’s minds. While the media rarely defines them as “top tier” issues, candidates have the opportunity to elevate children’s issues to that level. Candidates recognized as advocates for children are viewed more positively by voters. Moreover, there are constituency groups, beyond those that are typically seen as lobbying groups or “special interests,” that do want candidates to understand child policy issues and the role of the government in addressing them.

Candidates can develop and present children’s issues as part of their campaigns. The following are examples of actions that candidates for Congress have taken to promote children’s issues. These also help “elect children’s issues” during electoral campaigns.

Candidates do not have to start from scratch in this work. In addition to the general information provided here, there are federal child policy experts both nationally and within most congressional districts to provide information and perspective.

- Establish a child-policy committee within the campaign, drawing on respected experts and child advocates within the Congressional district or state.
- Ask child policy experts to provide information on federal programs and the services they provide within the Congressional district and state.
- Schedule meetings, listening sessions, or forums with groups and organizations that specifically serve or advocate on behalf of children.
- Agree to meet with child advocates when requested, and agree to include child policy concerns as a portion of at least one debate with political opponents, if those are scheduled.
- Conduct “work days” or field sessions visiting and touring or working at child-serving organizations.
- Issue policy statements on children’s issues and raise children’s issues in campaign materials.
- Recruit and enlist volunteers that will work on behalf of children’s issues.
- Include statements about the importance of the federal government in child policy in public speeches and at candidate events.
- Raise child policy issues when interviewed by the media.
What Child Advocates Can Do

In all states and Congressional districts, there are organizations that have, at least as part of their mission, advocating on behalf of children and families. Some may focus on economic security, while others focus on child abuse prevention, and still others on child health or education. Childcare providers, nurse practitioners, social workers, juvenile corrections officers, and foster parents and youth all have valuable insights and perspectives that should contribute to federal policy actions on children and families.

 Voices of child advocates can come across as a fragmented array of competing policy recommendations. Further, no one child electoral advocacy effort may be enough to elevate child policy issues to a level where candidates feel they must address them.

 By combining forces, child advocacy organizations can help candidates see both the “forest” of the federal government’s overall role in child policy and the individual “trees” that constitute their own area of focus.

 Child advocacy organizations can do the following to raise child-policy issues in federal campaigns.

- Come together to establish an overarching message on the importance of child policies, which is then used by individual organizations as an underlying theme, even when their contacts stress a particular child policy agenda.

- Disseminate information to candidates on child policy issues, such as this guide, with or without a cover letter or other description of endorsing/contributing organizations.

- Meet with editorial and news staff and media covering electoral campaigns and provide them with briefing materials on child policy issues.

- Schedule meetings with candidates or their policy staff to brief them on the federal child policy issues and offer to provide additional information.

- Follow-up on any requests for additional information, including providing state-specific (and even Congressional district-specific) information on how federal programs operate and who is served by them.

- Track candidate events and encourage local advocates to attend and raise child policy questions with candidates.

- Seek earned media, including letters-to-the-editor and op-eds, that raise these issues.

- Organize a candidate debate on child policy issues, or work with organizations moderating such debates to include child-policy questions.

- Seek responses from candidates to an open-ended set of questions on children’s issues and make their responses available in a voter’s guide on child policy issues.
The vast majority of voters are conscientious in exercising their right to vote and want to know where candidates stand on issues. Candidates often have clearly articulated positions on issues that are played out in the media or are promoted by the candidates themselves, but they may not relate to what any voter cares about most and wants to be reflected in his or her vote.

Most voters may never have an opportunity to directly question candidates, but they can do a number of things to make their perspectives known on child-policy issues.

The following are examples of actions voters can take to help ensure that their views are recognized within the federal electoral process. Actions like these will ultimately help set the child-policy agenda for the nation:

- Learn about child-policy issues and how they affect children and grandchildren in the community and state.
- Learn what candidates are saying on these child-policy issues.
- Discuss children’s issues with co-workers, relatives, friends and neighbors when talking “politics” and indicate the importance of them.
- Contact candidates to express personal views on child-policy issues.
- Write letters to the editor, attend candidate forums, and participate in political events as a voter with particular concerns about child policy.
- Consider what candidates say and do on child policy when exercising the right to vote.
- Track the performance of the winning candidates in following through on child-related pledges made during the campaign.

Ultimately, in American democracy, all elected officials are accountable to the people. Each vote and each voter matter. The more voters learn about child policies and expect candidates to speak to them, the more election process itself will provide direction to lawmakers to address the children’s needs in a way that represents voters’ concerns and hopes.
Child Policy Questions to Foster Dialogue and Response

What actions will you promote for Congress to take to:

1. Ensure all children have health coverage and this coverage is effective in responding to their health needs?

2. Close the “readiness gap” that appears before kids start school and accounts for so much of student underachievement and future problems?

3. Reduce the number of children who are subject to abuse and neglect, improve foster care and ensure a promising future for those leaving care?

4. Reduce poverty among children or otherwise ensure that children from low income families have the resources and supports they need so they do not have barriers to success?

5. Ensure all children have equal opportunities for success and close inequities that limit achieving that success?
The federal government plays the major and recognized role in providing for the health and economic security of U.S. seniors and adults with disabilities. Medicare, Social Security and other federal programs for seniors and those with disabilities account for 40 percent of the federal budget. National defense accounts for another 20 percent, and interest on the national debt 6 percent. Federal programs addressing energy, environment, business, the economy, higher education and public safety account for another significant share of the budget.

Children are 24 percent of the population, but federal investments in children represent a much smaller portion of the federal budget, about 10 percent. While a small part of the federal budget, they represent an essential foundation for states to meet children’s health, education, safety and security needs and ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed.

The table below shows federal, state and school investment on children. It provides both dollars invested and the share that federal investments represent of total public spending.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal, state and school funding for children, 2012 (in billions)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal Budget</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education (K-12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>Economic security</td>
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<td>Nutrition</td>
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<td>Early learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety (child welfare)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing/social services</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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NOTE: The $348 billion represents 10 percent of the $3.5 trillion federal budget. These figures are drawn from Kids’ Share 2013, which has apportioned different governmental spending programs for children (e.g. 47 percent of SNAP benefits are apportioned to children). There have been minor adaptations to the figures (e.g. to reflect TANF spending that goes to child care and Medicaid spending that goes to child welfare services). Two excellent sources for more information on the federal budget are: Kids Share 2013: Federal Spending on Children in 2012 and Future Projections (Urban Institute) and Children’s Budget: 2014 (First Focus). The First Focus report does not include the earned income tax credit and child tax credit refunds going to families, while the Urban Institute report does. Therefore, the First Focus report shows 8 percent, rather than 10 percent of the federal budget directed to children.
Iowa Children’s Policy Coalition

Members

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