

Forum II. Aging is an Asset for P-20+ Education

Intergenerational Initiative Policy Report: 2007- 2

I. Executive Summary

More than 20 years ago, Harold Hodgkinson, the famous demographer, published *All One System*, which presented the argument that a “nation’s graduate schools were dependent in part on the quality of its kindergartens.”¹ Ten years later, in *Two Different Worlds*, Patrick Callan, National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education and Michael Usdan, Institute for Educational Leadership wrote, “There is a profound cultural chasm between K-12 and higher education. The two sectors continue to live and work apart, with separate associations, professional worlds and networks.”² Today little has changed, students are the only ones who travel through the educational system from start to finish.

Amid this pessimism about a lack of connections between education and educators, Illinois has new hope. First, educators and policymakers are more aware of the bridges that must be built between all levels of education and are building them. Second, the increase of retirees, a generation that is passionate about learning, presents new opportunities for education from preschool through college. Only 22% of those 65+ volunteer and a mere 7% help in education.³

Another reason for hope is the P-20 Council⁴ that will be established early in 2008. The Council will bring new momentum to support consistent data, policy, testing, and curricula across the educational system. The great hope for the P-20 Council is that it will increase communication between all levels of education and engage all generations in shaping a seamless system of learning for Illinois.

Against that backdrop, the Aging is an Asset project was developed by education leaders, policymakers, aging experts, and retirees to contemplate the future of education in an aging world. Retirees must be part of the plan.

Aging is an Asset is a series of policy papers stemming from group discussions about the impact of aging on all aspects of life and how education can benefit from this demographic change.

This is the second in the series and will explore the potential for a seamless system of education, which experts call P-20, (preschool through college) and how retirees are helping. The other topics in the series are higher education and building strong communities. In 2007-2008 three additional discussions and policy papers will target the workforce, civic engagement and civility, and the economic impact of retirement and older volunteers.

II. Recommendations for Aging is an Asset for P-20+

The discussions during the Aging is an Asset meeting reflected a desire to do a better job of publicizing the ways that retirees can help with education and develop a different mindset among educators about their usefulness. These recommendations are the result of a discussion on February 26, 2007 that was chaired by Senator Ed Maloney and held at Heartland Community College in Bloomington. The speakers were Charles Johnson, director, Illinois Department on Aging, Kimberly Lightford, chair, Education Committee, and Randy Tinder, president, Illinois Association of School Administrators. The participants included educators, retirees, students, and representatives of aging organizations. We hope the following recommendations will stimulate discussion.

P-20+ Dialogue

Convene a yearly P-20+ gathering that promotes communication between all levels of education and instructs participants about experiences and progress of each level of education: early learners, preschool, grade school, middle school, high school, community colleges and universities.

Technology

Every high school and middle school should have a technology training program for the community's retirees.

Aging and Education

Education and aging organizations must foster closer connections. Align the needs and opportunities of aging in Illinois and with those of education.

Lifelong Pipeline

Create an additional Illinois Educational Pipeline that portrays the beginnings from 0 to 3 and continues to the end of the lifespan.

Understanding Aging

Help all generations understand aging. Education at all levels should include aging concepts in the curriculum, in math science, English, literature, social sciences, biology across the curriculum.

Media

Publicize the ways that retirees can help with education and develop a mindset among educators about their usefulness.

P-20+

*P-20+ represents
P(preschool) through 20
(college). The + symbolizes
lifelong learning.*

Forum Two: Aging is an Asset for P-20+ Education

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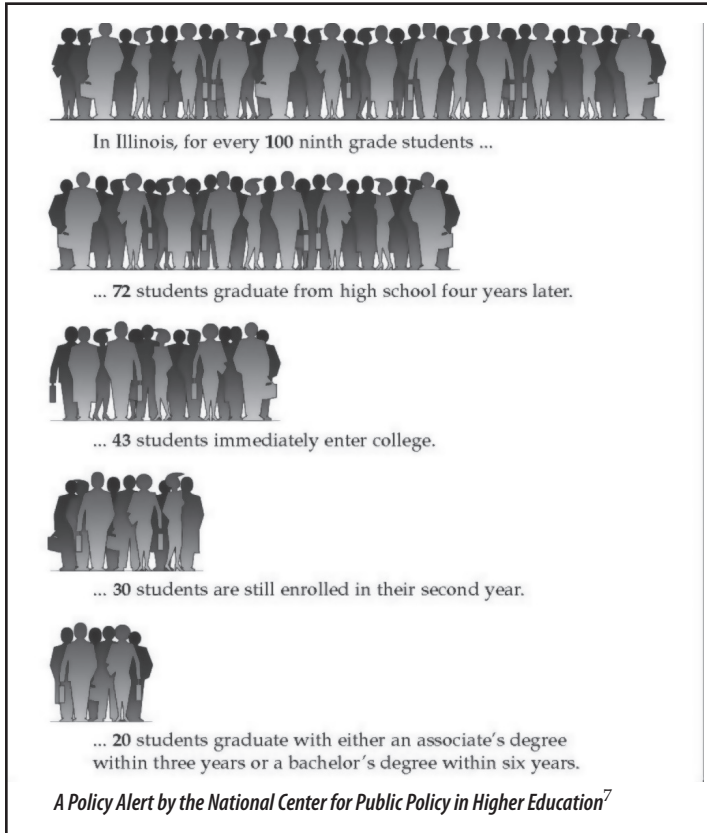
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Illinois Senate Higher Education Committee
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III. The Illinois Educational Pipeline

The Educational Pipeline was produced by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems as a way of connecting the data about “drop outs from high school and student retention in college.”⁶ It is an estimate of the student’s survival from ninth grade to graduation. In Illinois for every 100 ninth grade students, only 20 will graduate with an associate’s degree within three years or a bachelor’s degree within six years.⁷



“Retirees are valuable resources for P-20 education because they have experienced transitions throughout their lives and understand perseverance.”
Senator Ed Maloney, Chair, Senate Higher Education Committee

The pipeline was one of the first topics discussed during the Aging is an Asset Forum on February 28. The speakers and participants acknowledged the great needs, but also envisioned a more connected educational system and how retirees could support P-20 learning. “The key to success means communication and stronger ties between all levels of education,” said Senator Ed Maloney, D-Chicago, chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee. “Retirees are valuable resources for P-20 education because they have experienced transitions throughout their lives and understand perseverance.”

Charles Johnson, director of the Illinois Department on Aging noted “There are 2 million older people who are resources, many just waiting to

There are 2 million older people in Illinois, many of them just waiting to be asked.

Charles Johnson,
executive director, Illinois
Department on Aging

be asked to be involved with young people. These are mutually beneficial relationships—retirees get something out of it and the educational system benefits greatly.” Johnson’s views are supported by the Joys of Retirement study, a survey of 3000 Illinois retirees, conducted by the Intergenerational Initiative. Of those who said they didn’t volunteer, 68.3% said they would if asked: 86.1% said they would if asked to do something of interest to them.⁸

If retirees and students helping one another is such a win/win situation, then why doesn’t every school, community college, and university have an intergenerational infrastructure? The answer is found in *Teaching the Elephant to Dance*⁹ by James Belasco. He describes the way that elephants are conditioned to a quiet behavior. When elephants are young, their trainers shackle them so they will stay in place. Older elephants have been conditioned not to move as long as they have that metal piece around their leg. Like elephants, the educational system is bound by conditioning. Education leaders don’t tap the skills and experiences of older adults, not because they think it is unimportant, but because they have never done it.

In the spirit of P-20+ and a lifelong approach to learning, another pipeline needs to be designed. The new pipeline is one that begins with the first moments of life and continues until the last. The *lifelong pipeline* represents an environment that gives individuals the opportunity to achieve and then the responsibility to enrich the system for others.

Nancy Morrow-Howell, the co-editor of a special issue of *Generations*, the Journal of the American Society on Aging compares volunteering for younger and older generations: “The youth service movement is about the building of capacity, personal development of young people for citizenship and the workplace. In contrast, the civic engagement of older adults is about the utilization of capacity.” What is needed is development of service opportunities that can engage people across all phases of life.”¹¹

Joys of Retirement Survey

Of those who said they didn’t volunteer, 68.3% said they would if asked: 86.1% said they would if asked to do something of interest to them.

IV. Retirees as a Resource for P-20 Education

Retirement often brings a sense of loss but over time many retirees fill that gap with a variety of activities, including volunteering. In the Joys of Retirement survey, the main reasons for volunteering were to help others and also to stay active and connected. “Intergenerational programs serve both as a tool for developing ties across age groups and as a strategy for involving greater numbers of individuals in addressing community needs,”¹⁰ according to James E. Hinterlong and Angela Wilson in *Generations*.

Throughout P-20 education, students are tutored, mentored, and succeed, some because an older person gave time to help them, believed in them, and challenged them. The helping is a two-way street: students help elders learn about computers, rake their leaves, and save family stories by conducting oral history interviews. Students and retirees alike grow from the contributions they give one another. The following are examples of preschool through college.

A. Preschool

*Preschool children involved in intergenerational programs, are more likely to have higher personal/social development scores as compared to preschool children in non-intergenerational programs.*¹²

Vickie Rosebrook, Macklin Intergenerational Institute

Oakton Community College Early Childhood Center

One of the pioneers in the intergenerational movement in Illinois was Helen Block Fields at the Oakton Community College Early Childhood Center. Older people were the backbone of her curriculum and positive forces for education. For example, she found that young children were often frightened by a new environment on the first day of school. “The presence of a caring elder was an anchor for children.”

“The lucky kids who connect with retirees in preschool become more familiar with the aging process. They have opportunities to talk one-on-one about age spots, big veins, and gray hair with elders who easily respond to their questions and comments. In preschool the children learn about their history and that of their peers. Retirees show pictures of themselves as babies and young children, and tell the stories of their educational experiences.”

“The unlucky kids who don’t have a retiree in their classroom will not have opportunities to trust and care about a non-related older person in an educational setting. They will miss the chance to store and absorb positive attitudes toward healthy aging in their young impressionable brains.”

Helen Block Fields, Emerita, Oakton Community College

“The lucky kids who connect with retirees in preschool become more familiar with the aging process.”

Helene Block Fields

B. Grade Schools

Children in the primary grades today will enjoy an unprecedented longevity stretching for 80 or more years. Moreover, when they are 60, about 20-25% of the population will be 60 or older. So it is essential for them to develop positive attitudes toward older people, toward aging, and toward planning for their long lives.¹³

Ann Gale, Chicago Department on Aging

In 2005, 23% of eighth grade students entering high school were at risk of dropping out because they didn't read well enough to understand the material in their textbooks.¹⁶

Alliance for Excellent Education

HURRAH

Happy Upbeat Retirees (& Other Residents) Actively Helping

The HURRAH program is a great success story. Founded in 1989 by two retired teachers, they have over 200 retirees who volunteer throughout the school system in grade schools, middle schools, and high schools. HURRAH volunteers provide tutoring, mentoring, and classroom support and are involved in the most popular program, improving reading skills. HURRAH volunteers provide one-on-one reading or group assistance to students who need extra help to keep pace with their classmates.

The lady volunteers are often referred to as "Grandma Readers" because of their close relationship with their students, but many male volunteers also participate, including retired businessmen, policemen, firemen and the mayor of Naperville. Educators say, "HURRAH volunteers provide an important value to our students. They accept students where they are and then move them forward with patience, perseverance and good humor. Our community is blessed by their presence."

Russ Marineau, IBM retiree and chair, HURRAH Program, District 203, Naperville

C. Middle School

The transition to middle school can be intimidating. It is the first time students deal with class changes, lockers and combinations. They have to organize themselves so they get the correct materials from their lockers and get to their next class in the allotted time. Retirees are helpful in the first days of class to help students with the transition and act as guides in the maze of middle-school hallways.

Barbar Rester, Volunteer Coordinator, Carbondale Middle School

Retiree Computer Partnership with Washington School

Middle school programs often focus on technology, bringing older adults into the classroom and teaching them about computers and the Internet. At Washington Middle School in Springfield the program coordinators designed the program with two dimensions. First the retirees came to class to discuss social and historical issues with the students. Then the retirees came to the school for 90 minutes a week for six weeks to participate in computer lessons. The students were responsible for creating weekly lesson plans centered around beginning computer skills, which they presented to their assigned senior citizen.

Students loved to participate in the project even though it was demanding and challenging. Attendance and behavior improved as well as the communication and writing skills of middle school students. In addition to becoming computer experts, they also met goals relating to history, English, geography, math and science. The students have the experience in the role of a teacher, which gives them leadership experience as well as the workforce skills of preparing, speaking, setting goals, and solving problems.

“Fewer than a fourth of high-school graduates felt significantly challenged in high school.”
2004 Achieve Survey¹⁸

D. High School

High school reform has been front and center in education circles. The Study of High Student Engagement asked the question: “What is the purpose of schooling in high schools today? Is it to get students to pass classes and standardized tests, get a high school degree, and move on? Or is it to engage students deeply in learning, to plant seeds of intellectual interest that will carry the student into the next stages of education and work?”¹⁷

High School Study of Student Engagement

The U.S. High School graduation rate lags behind those of more than a dozen other industrialized nations¹⁹
Chronicle of Higher Education

Honoring Older Generations and Celebrating Cultures

The fear of aging wasn't exactly what planners had in mind when they scheduled the Honoring Older Generations, an Intergenerational Leadership event with high school students and retirees. The plan was to discuss the importance of gathering family history from older people who were important in the students' lives. However after a day-long meeting, students were open about their fears: “I know it will sound a little corny, but it does help me not to be afraid to get old. The retirees are still very much alive and enjoy their lives,” commented one student.

Differences in perceptions
of high school
and college faculty

Students are not prepared
for college are the
perceptions of:

40 percent students
25 percent college faculty
12 percent high school
faculty²⁰

High school students from the Small School of the Arts and Brother Rice High School in Chicago, and Richards High School in Oaklawn had the opportunity to learn more about others of different ages and cultures. The students were challenged to get 100 people into 10 groups and then to begin a discussion about the stories of older generations and the relationship of their experiences to the present. There were many laughable moments and a few tears as retirees spoke about their life stories.

Students learned about linking public history to family history. One student said, "The discussions today made me remember and appreciate my grandparents, and now I am curious about my ancestry." At the close of the day, elders and even once-shy students were eager to come to the microphone to tell what they had learned.

E. Higher Education

Our Senior Professionals Program pairs retirees with students to expand the knowledge for both. The program is so successful that when the students graduate, the retirees waste little time in asking for another student.

Al Bowman, president, Illinois State University

Retiree Mentor Programs

What would you do if on your first day as a college freshman, you walked into the classroom and found older people in every other seat? This is what happened to a group of first-year students who were part of the Retiree Mentors Program at SIUC. Tapping the talents of retirees originally seemed to be less than daring or dramatic, but the students saw the humor and wisdom of blending ages, ideas, cultures and people.

"An estimated 40% of
four-year college students
and 63% of two-year
college students end up
taking at least one remedial
course."²¹

Governance Divide

The program was designed and developed by Dr. Seymour Bryson, SIUC Associate Chancellor, and included retired faculty who helped students take better notes, prepare for exams, organize their time, and discuss similar survival and academic topics. It was apparent that the students acted differently from their peers in similar programs. The students opened up with the mentors about their problems and concerns, such as housing, roommates, classes, schedules and home life. The class attendance was close to 100% and pointed to the great potential of retiree mentoring programs for first-year students. The program involved 15 older mentors for a class of 30 students. The mentors reported that the experience was challenging, as well

as providing a means to renew or strengthen their ties to an institution that most of them had served for a considerable part of their careers.

V. Building the P-20+ Infrastructure

Everyone has an opinion about what we need to fix the system of education. We point fingers at other levels of education that they are not producing students ready for the next level. We must drop all these barriers and accept the fact that things will get better by working together.

Randy Tinder, president, Illinois Association of School Administrators

Clearly younger and older generations have reasons to be together, but unfortunately it isn't happening as an integral part of our educational system. The economic cost is great in lost resources for schools, such as the potential to improve reading and math scores, raise the bar for academic achievement, or give students the big picture about what education means in their lives told from people with knowledge of the peaks and valleys. Building an infrastructure for connecting generations isn't something that will happen overnight. During the Aging is an Asset Forum, Senator Kimberly Lightford, chair, Senate Education Committee observed, "When we have new ideas, we have to chip away at the resistance and publicize why it is beneficial to our students. Education needs a big umbrella with many partners under it. Retirees should be included as valued partners."

The first step is to "Begin with an awareness of the needs of education and the skills and abilities of retirees says Carla Gosney, director of the RSVP (Retired Senior and Volunteer Program) at John Wood Community College in Quincy. Classes can inform retirees about educational issues and why the entire community benefits from a good school system. Administrators and teachers need to learn what retirees can bring to education." Clearly schools and colleges that are interested in involving older adults need to develop a welcoming and asking mechanism.

"One strategy is pre-retirement seminars that include information beyond financial concerns. Baby Boomers need to be brought into the system early after their retirement and asked, 'What it would take for you to volunteer?'" Gosney suggests that when recruiting retirees for education, work with an existing retiree group through your community, campus or religious organization. Ask them to assist with a specific project. Another way to recruit volunteers is through Grandparents Day at the schools or campus

Where retirees volunteer:

Church or Religious Organization 51%
Museum 29.1%
Community Organization 28.9%
Hospital 25.1%
Library 21.9%
Joys of Retirement Survey

Those who volunteered in educational settings:
University 16.5%
Grade School 15.8%
Community College 14.9%
High School 7.3%
Preschool 6%
Joys of Retirement Survey

events sponsored by students. Career Days bring retirees to discuss their former professions and to give students a realistic picture of the workforce.”

“Having a commission or council does not do much unless you attach some sort of responsibility or accountability to it.”²³
Patrick Callan, National Center on Public Policy in Higher Education

A user-friendly system of recruitment was established by Mary Simon, a 92-year old emerita of SIUC. Her *Find Five*²² program is based on inviting a few friends and colleagues to coffee and then asking them to find five good volunteers. A personal invitation is what many retirees say they want.

VI. P-20+ in the U.S. and in Illinois

Harold Hodgkinson and Michael Usdan were early advocates for a seamless system of education. Those ground-breaking ideas have gradually evolved to a movement that will connect all levels of education. More recently statewide coordination P-20 education has been championed by the Education Commission of the States, The Education Trust, the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Several states have active P-16 or P-20 systems. Carl Frueger, in a report for the Education Commission of the states wrote that he “has watched several efforts trail off in recent years as the governors who began them — and who served as the key force pulling the players together — have left office. One of the problems P-16 has faced is that it can be very difficult for a P-16 initiative to survive a leadership change.”²⁰ Patrick Callan, National Center on Public Policy in Higher Education, says that “having a commission or council does not do much unless you attach some sort of responsibility or accountability to it.”²³

In the best of all possible worlds, these new initiatives connect all levels of education and will have an impact on college readiness and the lack of consistency in high school and college policies, curricula, and testing. Andrea Venezia, a member of the Bridge Project at Stanford University says, “Students graduate from high school under one set of standards and three months later, are required to meet a whole new set of standards in college.”²⁴

Class of 2002 College Readiness

Not/Least Ready 34%
Minimally Ready 11%
Somewhat Ready: 17%
More Ready 17%
Most Ready 20%
IL Education Research Council.²⁵

College readiness in Illinois has been well documented by the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC) housed at SIU Edwardsville. One of the first studies was to follow the Class of 2002 and determine their readiness for and persistence in college. They found that 37% were most/more, or somewhat ready. The Council was established in 2000 by the Illinois Board of Higher Education. Its mission is to foster education research and evaluation, policy analysis, and reviews to further P-20 efforts. The IERC will work closely with the P-20 Council.

VII. Summary

Aging is an Asset for P-20 supports the idea that P-20 success means specific educational goals, such as gathering data, strengthening transitions, and developing a consistent curriculum. It also means social goals, firing up the community to support education, smoothing transitions from one level to the next, and increasing communication between all levels of education. This is a job for all generations.

VIII. Acknowledgements and Forum Participants

On February 26, 2007, retirees, education leaders, legislators, and students joined in the second Aging is an Asset Forum, which was a discussion of the P-20 system and the potential for retirees to make an impact as mentors, tutors, and assisting students with transitions.

Thank you to participants, speakers, writers, group leaders, planners, and facilitators including:

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from Jane Angelis, director, Intergenerational Initiative and editor, Continuance Magazine, SIU Carabondale

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X. P-20 Councils: New Legislation

The P -20 Councils, a new legislative effort that becomes law on January 1, 2008, proposes to bring stronger connections between all levels of education through curricula, testing, and policy throughout the educational system. Excerpts from Illinois Public Act 95-0626

“The General Assembly finds that preparing Illinoisans for success in school and the workplace requires a continuum of quality education from preschool through graduate school. This State needs a framework to guide education policy and integrate education at every level.

A statewide coordinating council will study and make recommendations concerning education at all levels and avoid fragmentation of policies, promote improved teaching and learning, and continue to cultivate and demonstrate strong accountability and efficiency. Establishing an Illinois P-20 Council will develop a statewide agenda that will move the State toward the common goals of improving academic achievement, increasing college access and success, improve use of existing data and measurements, developing improved accountability, promoting lifelong learning, easing the transition to college and reducing remediation.

A pre-kindergarten through grade 20 agenda will strengthen this State’s economic competitiveness by producing a highly skilled workforce. In addition, lifelong learning plans will enhance this State’s ability to leverage funding.”

From Illinois Public Act 95-0626: School CD P-20 Council

Senate Sponsors

Senators Deanna Demuzio, Susan Garrett, Edward Maloney, A.J. Wilhelmi, and Pamela J. Althoff

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The Intergenerational Initiative

The Intergenerational Initiative was founded in 1986 with funding from the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The goal is to foster communication and contact between generations thus enriching the educational experience for all ages. The Intergenerational Initiative is a partnership of 70+ organizations representing, retirees, students, service organizations, business, state agencies, and education at all levels.

Continuance magazine, a quarterly publication founded in 1987, highlights the importance of “Knowledge and understanding passing from generation to generation.”

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