

Letter to the editor

Recession affects children's progress

Hard data support the heartbreaking personal stories in news anchor Katie Couric's piece about the impact of the recession on children ("The recession's tiniest victims need help, too," The Forum, May 18).

Children can be irreparably harmed during critical early years. We need to focus on them not only because of their vulnerability but because of the adults they will become.

Research compiled by the Partnership for America's Economic Success shows that children who were repeatedly hungry in kindergarten went on to have third-grade test scores that were 13% lower than those of their peers. Chronic hunger increases a child's likelihood of getting into fights and, ironically, becoming obese. Moving three or more times between the ages of 4 and 7 — a reality many face in today's housing market — makes a child 19% less likely than non-moving peers to graduate from high school.

The costs of these consequences will not be limited to a single generation. Today's children will be the employees, consumers and leaders who drive our economy in the future. To succeed, they need loving families, stable housing, health care, nutrition and quality early-learning environments. We know how to meet these responsibilities; programs such as food stamps and pre-kindergarten contribute lasting benefits. Policy-makers, business leaders and non-profits can protect children and the country by ensuring these kinds of investments remain top priorities, especially during the recession.

Sara Watson, director
Partnership for America's
Economic Success; The Pew Center
On the States; Washington
Social Security

Objectives

- ▶ Read the article “Recession affects children’s progress”
- ▶ Identify the various points the writer makes in the article
- ▶ State a position on the article
- ▶ Collaborate and use critical thinking to create persuasive arguments for or against the funding
- ▶ Evaluate the strength or weakness of an argument for its intended audience

Preparation

Each student will need:

- ▶ A copy of the article “Recession affects children’s progress”
- ▶ A copy of the lesson
- ▶ A copy of Partnership for America’s fact sheet for each student (2 pages)
http://www.partnershipforsuccess.org/uploads/20081110_Researchfactsheet0904.pdf

Introduction (15 minutes)

In May 2009, USA TODAY did a series of stories and opinion pieces on the effects of the recession on young children.

In one piece (“The recession’s tiniest victims need help, too”), Katie Couric wrote, “The real gut-wrenching stories of the economic downturn reach well beyond the offices of Wall Street or the corridors of power in Washington. You see, the collateral damage of this recession is felt by our smallest, and weakest, citizens our children... No one can say how many children in this country are homeless, but it’s safe to assume that the recession is worsening the problem. With more than 2 million families expected to lose homes in foreclosure this year, more boys and girls like Lawrie and Isabel will undoubtedly suffer... In Phoenix, Children’s Hospital reports a 40% increase in child abuse and neglect cases this year. In Cleveland, Rainbow Babies and Children’s Hospital has seen more middle-class families turning to the emergency room for basic health care because their children are uninsured.”

In a letter to the editor, Sara Watson refers to Couric’s opinion piece and gives statistics on how a lack of finances when a child is young can impact his/her future ability to learn and earn.

1. What four specific facts does Watson mention regarding young children and the impact of economic stress?
2. Why do you think being constantly hungry in kindergarten would result in lower test scores three years later?
3. Why do you think being constantly hungry would increase the likelihood of a child getting into fights?
4. Why do you think being constantly hungry would lead to obesity later in life?
5. What economic reasons might make a family move three or more times in three years?
6. Watson says children need five things to succeed. What are those five things?
7. What programs can help meet some of these five needs, according to Watson?

Watson is director for Partnership for America’s Economic Success, an organization which does research on the fiscal impact of early education. “The Partnership uses these research findings to inform the nation about how to secure our economic future by helping all children become successful adults – literate, numerate, job-ready and team-capable.”

Get in groups of three. Assign the letter “G” or the letter “B” to each group. In the groups, each person will take a turn and read one of the bullet points on page 2 of “PAES: Who We Are” fact sheet.

When you’ve completed reading, the G groups will use their graphic organizer (page 4) to create up to five arguments persuading their congressional representative to fund or not fund programs that relate to the five needs Watson discusses: loving families, stable housing, health care, nutrition and quality early-learning environments. The statements will go in the left column and the facts supporting this statement should be written in the right side of the graphic organizer.

After completing the reading, the B groups will focus on persuading members of the local chamber of commerce on why local businesses and business leaders should or should not support programs that relate to the five needs Watson discusses. They will use their graphic organizers in the same way.

Each group needs to keep its audience in mind by stating the benefits or drawbacks for their audience. Each group should be prepared to share its two most persuasive arguments with the class.

Debrief/Application (15 minutes)

As a class, answer the following debrief questions.

1. If you are a G group that supported funding, give your top two arguments why.
2. If you are a G group that did not support funding, give your top two arguments why not.
(If you did have two opposing views, ask the class as a whole, “Which argument was more compelling for you? Why?)
4. Repeat for the B groups.
5. What if your business taxes were increased to fund these programs—would you still be in favor of funding these programs?
6. As a business leader, would you be willing to personally endorse these programs and encourage others to help fund these programs?”
7. As an individual, were you surprised to learn these facts on how poverty affects a student’s ability to learn and earn money later in life? How do you think these facts will impact your thinking now? Later?

Can investing in children help America’s economic future? (25 minutes)

Should government/businesses support funding for early-childhood health and welfare initiatives?	
Statement	Fact/Opinion
Statement	Fact/Opinion
Statement	Fact/Opinion
Statement	Fact/Opinion
Statement	Fact/Opinion