

Americans Would Rather Invest in Children and Youth than Get a Tax Cut

In response to President Bush's promise to deliver a sweeping \$1.6 billion dollar tax cut, many people have questioned whether our nation's sustained economic growth and budget surpluses would not be better spent in making an investment in children. In fact, in a recent nationwide poll conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International for the organization Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, the American people give higher priority to investments that help children and youth get the right start in life, than they do a tax cut.

The poll illustrates that the public wants Congress to use the federal budget surplus to first fully fund programs that help kids, "so that they never turn to crime and violence," said Sanford Newman, Fight Crime's president. The nationwide anti-crime organization is made up of more than 1,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and victims of violence who call on the government to fund programs that are proven to help fight crime.

Of the 1,000 adults polled, when asked, "Which of the following priorities, if any, are more important than cutting taxes?", two-thirds identified "reducing child abuse and neglect," "helping schools better educate disadvantaged students," and "providing access to after-school programs and school readiness programs like Head Start" as national priorities. The results remained consistent in different regions of the country, as well as in rural and urban areas.

These results complement research that has found that investments in children's school readiness, after-school enrichment, and school-to-work and job training programs prevent later crime and violence. It has been proven that such investments ultimately pay for themselves because they save the federal government money in terms of decreased costs for a crime. A RAND Corporation report shows that, even without counting the savings to crime victims and society, the resulting savings to government alone from effective early childhood programs exceeds the costs of the programs by two to four times.

In a second report by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids title *From America's Front Line Against Crime: A School and Youth Violence Prevention Plan*, the organization outlines four steps the federal government can take to dramatically reduce school and youth violence.

1. "Assure all school-age children and teens have access to after-school, weekend, and summer youth development programs to shut down the 'primetime for juvenile crime'."

During the hours from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., young people are more likely to engage in criminal activity, be victims of crime, engage in sexual activity, smoke, drink alcohol, and use drugs. However, children who take part in extracurricular activities are 49 percent less likely to use drugs and 37 percent less likely to become teen parents.

National PTA supports school-based before- and after-school programs, such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers, that provide additional learning opportunities for children and activities such as tutoring, recreation, technology, education, and literacy programs in a safe, adult supervised environment.

2. "Assure all babies and preschool children access to the quality educational child-care programs . . ."

Research shows that quality early childhood development programs improve student achievement and reduce problems such as special education placements, dropouts, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, and delinquency. National PTA is committed to removing the barriers faced by at-risk children, and supports quality early prevention programs, such as Head Start, Even Start, Sure 14 Start, Title 1, bilingual, toddler, and preschool programs for children with disabilities.

3. “Help schools identify troubled and disruptive children at an early age, and provide children and their parents with the counseling and training that can help kids get back on track.”

Counseling services are proven to reduce the odds of a disruptive child later being assigned to special classes, being rated disruptive by teachers and peers, or being required to repeat a grade in school, which are all risk factors of future violence.

National PTA recognizes that a mentally healthy home, school, and community environment is essential to the development of proper attitudes toward oneself and others. Therefore, National PTA strongly endorses efforts to establish comprehensive community mental health facilities to provide preventive and treatment services to children and youth. In addition, National PT endorses efforts to provide special preventive services in the school to detect impeding difficulties early.

4. “Improve deficient parenting and prevent child abuse and neglect by offering high-risk parents in-home parenting/coaching; and making sure child protective, foster care, and adoption services have policies and enough well-trained staff to protect and heal abused and neglected children.”

Many children who suffer from abuse need specialized treatment for the trauma they have experienced. Being abused or neglected as a child has been proven to increase the risk that a child will become violent later in life. National PTA supports efforts to provide educational programs for parents to improve the atmosphere of the home. Also, National PT believes the families involved in child abuse/neglect offenses need specialized counseling and rehabilitation to reduce repeat offenses.

Children should be the nation’s top priority, and National PTA believes federal budgetary appropriations must be adequate to carry out its commitment to education to prepare the work force to meet the nation’s economic and defense needs, and to ensure the overall welfare of every child.

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