



Ascend at the Aspen Institute

is a catalyst and convener for diverse leaders working across systems and sectors to build intergenerational family prosperity and well-being by intentionally focusing on children and the adults in their lives together. We believe in the power of co-creation. We are a community of leaders – well-connected, well-prepared, and well-positioned – building political will that transforms hearts, minds, policies, and practices.



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The Aspen Institute

is a global nonprofit organization whose purpose is to ignite human potential to build understanding and create new possibilities for a better world. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve society's greatest challenges. It is headquartered in Washington, DC and has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, as well as an international network of partners.

TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES TO FAMILY WELL-BEING

Meeting Children and Parents Where They Dream

Two-generation (2Gen) approaches build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives *together*. 2Gen begins with the mindset that by designing pathways to educational and economic success that support children and families together, the resulting structure is stronger and better for both generations. Communities do better as everyone achieves their full potential. As children, parents, and families grow and change across their lifespan, 2Gen approaches align opportunities to help families pursue their goals and thrive, optimizing each person's potential along the way.

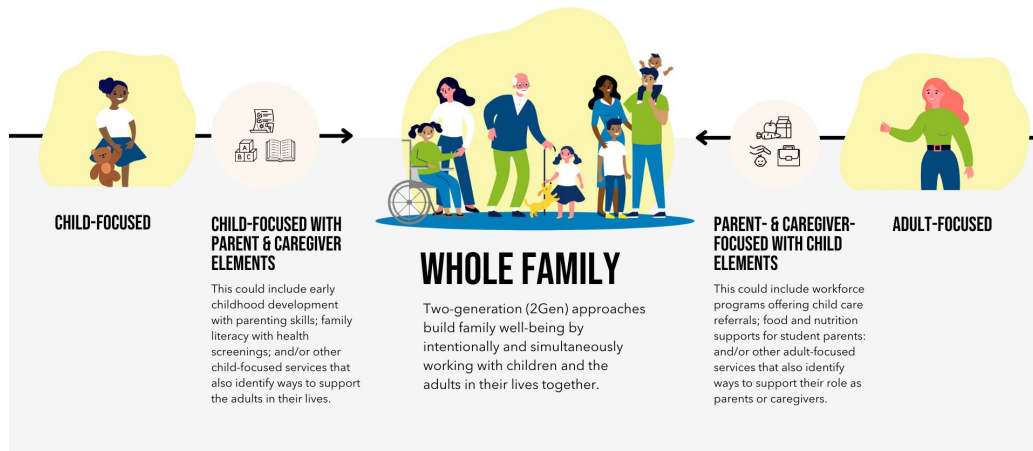
As we undertake the hard work of a just recovery from the pandemic and a full reckoning with racial injustice, this aspirational mindset underpinned by research is essential. This mindset must be embodied and embedded in the policies and practices we advance. For example, if parents qualify for a state or federal tuition grant to pursue postsecondary education, then it makes sense to see if a high-quality child care program is available to make sure that while they are studying, their children are learning, too. (See voter poll data below.) This 2Gen mindset and approach can unleash new possibilities for greater impact from dollars already spent on Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), child care and workforce programs, and more.



Don't meet parents where they are. Meet parents where they dream."

*– Janine McMahon,
Ascend Parent Advisor*

TWO-GENERATION (#2GEN) APPROACHES CENTER WHOLE FAMILIES



Since 2010, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, founded and led by Anne Mosle, has built a national Network of nearly 600 partners and is propelling a national movement of practitioners, policymakers, philanthropic leaders, and researchers to seed and sustain 2Gen approaches in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico as well as across the globe in Ireland, Rwanda, and Guatemala. The Ascend Fellowship identifies and invests in bold leaders who are working across sectors that impact the vitality and wellness of families, from reinventing systems of care and unlocking capital that opens new doors to economic mobility to revolutionizing our understanding of brain development for parents and caregivers. Together, we have ignited a movement reaching more than 15 million families.

What We're Going For: Family Well-Being

The well-being of children and families is the strongest and most fundamental signal of the state of our communities and country. The 2Gen approach defines well-being holistically, just as parents themselves do. Parents express a sense of well-being when they have opportunities to thrive financially, they experience physical and mental health, and their children demonstrate educational success and are secure and happy.

National polls conducted since 2012 demonstrate strong and enduring public support for the 2Gen approach. Voters across the political spectrum and in all regions of the country endorse the 2Gen approach, with 85 percent of 2020 respondents expressing support. The bipartisan polls, conducted by Lake Research Partners and the Tarrance Group, have found that a 2Gen approach is a common-sense way to address poverty that appeals to both sides of the political aisle and nearly all demographic cohorts. Support for this pragmatic, deliberate whole-family approach has remained strong and consistent for the past decade.



A two-generation approach that helps lift low-income families out of poverty and lines them up to get an education and champion their way to success together.” – Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM), who has introduced the bipartisan Two-Generation Economic Empowerment Act bill with Senator Susan Collins (R-ME).

Six Key Components of 2Gen

A 2Gen approach recognizes six key components to improve families' financial stability, social capital, health care, and quality education:

THE SIX KEY COMPONENTS OF TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES

Two-generation approaches (2Gen) build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

- Head Start
- Early Head Start
- child care partnerships
- preK
- home visiting
- Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (FFN)

K-12

- kindergarten ready
- 3rd grade reading skills
- parent engagement
- graduation and postsecondary prep

POSTSECONDARY & EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

- community college
- training and credentials
- workforce partnerships
- employer partnerships

SOCIAL CAPITAL

- peer and family networks
- coaching
- cohort strategies

HEALTH, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH

- mental, physical, and behavioral health
- coverage and access to care
- adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress

ECONOMIC ASSETS

- asset building
- housing and public supports
- financial capacity
- transportation



- 1. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:** Development programs, like child care, Head Start, and home visiting. Investments in high-quality early education yield a 13% per year return on investment based on increased school and career achievement as well as reduced social costs.
- 2. K-12 LEARNING:** More K-12 schools are adopting two-generation approaches. Schools serve as community anchors and provide strong platforms for both children and the adults in their lives to thrive.
- 3. POSTSECONDARY AND EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS:** Parents who complete a college degree double their incomes. A parent's level of educational attainment is also a strong predictor of a child's success.
- 4. ECONOMIC ASSETS:** A relatively small increase in household income can have a significant, lasting positive impact on the life of a child. A \$3,000 increase in parents' income when their child is young is associated with a 17% increase in the child's future earnings.
- 5. HEALTH, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH:** Physical and mental health have a major impact on a family's ability to thrive. The dynamics of federal and state health care access policies through Medicaid are critical factors in identifying barriers and opportunities for increasing the health and well-being of children and their parents.
- 6. SOCIAL CAPITAL:** Institutional conditions that support social networks can significantly increase access to and retention of parents in programs and services, as well as improve connection and relationships among families and parents.

How We Get There: The Hallmarks of the 2Gen Approach

Ascend partners with leaders across research, practice, policy, and philanthropy around a set of five core principles to guide policy, practice, and systems changes. Across numerous initiatives and innovations at the federal, state, Tribal, and local levels, the process of putting these principles into action has yielded a set of hallmark characteristics that describe what a 2Gen approach, strategy, organization, or system looks like. In most 2Gen efforts, you will notice people consciously and conscientiously choosing to do the following:

- Measure and account for outcomes for both children and their parents.
- Listen to the voices and recommendations of families.
- Ensure racial, gender, and economic equity.
- Foster evidence and innovation together.
- Align and link systems and funding streams.

2Gen in Action

Under Founder Anne Mosle’s leadership, Ascend focuses on the networks and systems most able to influence the lives of families as illuminated in the landmark report *State of the Field: Two Generation Approaches to Family Well-Being*. These include the trillion dollars in public human services resources, community colleges, Head Start, United Ways, and community action agencies, among others.

Examples of 2Gen in action:

1. The Jeremiah Program provides housing, early childhood education, and life skills, and partners with local community colleges for postsecondary education. It began in 1998, in the Twin Cities in Minnesota, and is designed to help single mothers complete postsecondary education while their children are successfully prepared for kindergarten.

Under the dynamic leadership of Ascend Fellow Gloria Perez, and CEO Chastity Lord, Jeremiah has expanded to North Dakota, Texas, and Boston, Massachusetts.

2. Twelve states have implemented 2Gen approaches to align and coordinate their agencies and strengthen programmatic supports for families, including linking child care and early learning programs to workforce development and economic pathways, adopting new models of home visiting, and creating effective parent and child supports as states seek more effective and equitable outcomes for children and families: Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah, and Washington. Recently, the District of Columbia reimaged its Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to embrace a 2Gen approach.
3. There is an active 2Gen research community, including Northwestern University’s Two-Generation Research Initiative. At the University of Denver, Ascend Fellow Dr. Sarah Watamura and her colleague Dr. Pilyoung Kim, offered a compelling case in *Two Open Windows: Infant and Parent Neurobiologic Change* for the transition to parenting as a distinct and important sensitive period in which the brain undergoes neural development and growth. More recent updates to their research demonstrated that it is the act of transitioning to parenthood – whether as a biological parent or not – that opens a time-limited window where both new parent and baby are especially receptive to being shaped by their environments. This window of opportunity offers a second chance for young adults and caregivers to strengthen skills and capacities that can not only shape the critical interactions that build their babies’ brains, but also influence the behaviors that shape their health and employment.

