Pathways to the Middle Class: Balancing Personal and Public Responsibilities

Isabel V. Sawhill
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Children from top quintile much more likely to be middle class by middle age than children from bottom quintile

We define middle class by middle age as being at 300 percent of the poverty line by age 40. A middle class income for a family of 4 was about $68,000 in 2011.
Chances of Reaching the Middle Class by Middle Age Vary

- Blacks: 34%
- Bottom Income Quintile: 40%
- Hispanics: 52%
- Women: 57%
- ALL: 61%
- Men: 64%
- Whites: 68%
- Top Income Quintile: 75%
Benchmarks for Success

**Early childhood**
Acceptable pre-reading and math skills AND Behavior generally school-appropriate

**Middle childhood**
Basic reading and math skills AND Social-emotional skills

**Adolescence**
Graduates from high school w/GPA ≥ 2.5 AND Has not been convicted of a crime nor become a parent

**Transition to adulthood**
Lives independently AND Receives a college degree or has a family income ≥ 250% of the poverty level

**Adulthood**
Reaches middle class (family income at least 300% of the poverty level)
Percent of Children Succeeding at Each Life Stage

- Early Childhood (Age 5): 66%
- Middle Childhood (Age 11): 70%
- Adolescence (Age 19): 57%
- Transition to Adulthood (Age 29): 60%
- Adulthood (Age 40): 61%
Pathways to the Middle Class

55% ADVANTAGED
FAMILY FORMATION (AT BIRTH)
Born at normal birth weight to non-poor, married mother with at least a high school diploma

66% ON TRACK
EARLY CHILDHOOD (AGE 0-5)
Acceptable pre-reading and math skills AND Behavior generally school-appropriate

70% ON TRACK
MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (AGE 5-11)
Basic reading and math skills AND Social-emotional skills

57% ON TRACK
ADOLESCENCE (AGE 11-19)
Graduates high school w/GPA ≥2.5 AND has not been convicted of a crime nor become a parent

60% ON TRACK
TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD (AGE 19-29)
Lives independently AND Receives college degree or has family income ≥250% of poverty

61% ON TRACK
ADULTHOOD (AGE 29-40)
Reaches middle class Family income is ≥300% of poverty

45% DISADVANTAGED

34% OFF TRACK

30% OFF TRACK

43% OFF TRACK

40% OFF TRACK

39% OFF TRACK
Likelihood of Reaching Middle Class by Number of Successful Life Stages

- Less Advantaged
- More Advantaged

Number of Successful Interim Life Stages:

- 0: 21% Less Advantaged, 31% More Advantaged
- 1: 36% Less Advantaged, 51% More Advantaged
- 2: 44% Less Advantaged, 64% More Advantaged
- 3: 63% Less Advantaged, 70% More Advantaged
- 4: 75% Less Advantaged, 83% More Advantaged
Recommendations

- Need BOTH better policy and better individual responsibility
- Funding should be tied to evidence of effectiveness
- Better education from pre-K to 12
- More access to college or technical training
- Stronger starts for more children