

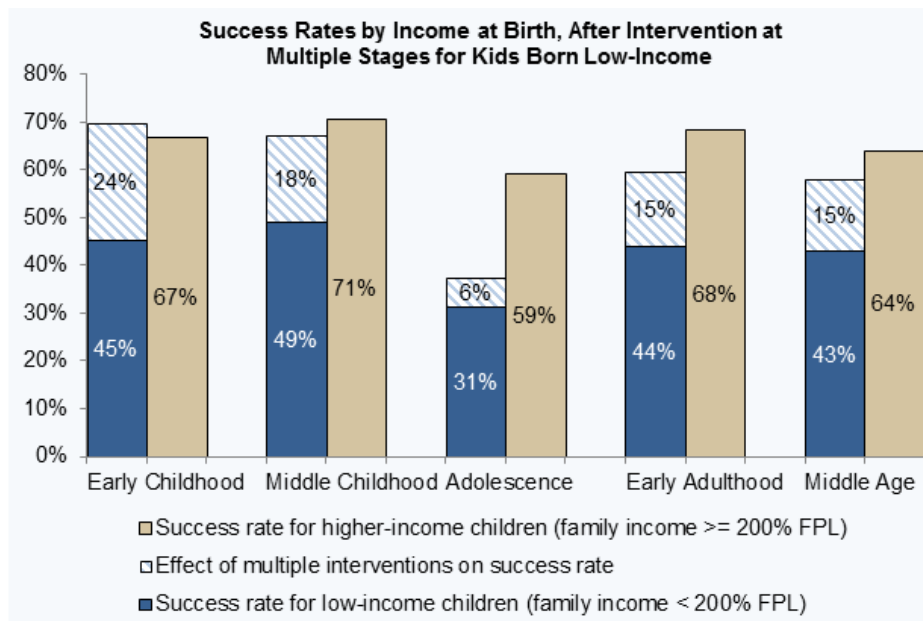
## Effective Childhood Intervention Programs Can Significantly Close the Gap Between Haves and Have-Nots, New Center on Children and Families Research Finds

Resulting Increased Incomes as Adults Pay for Programs 10-Fold; Likely Positive Taxpayer Value, Too

Well-evaluated targeted interventions could close over 70 percent of the gap between more- and less-advantaged youths, helping more children end up in the middle class by middle age, according to a new research paper released today by the Center on Children and Families (CCF) at Brookings. As a result, social mobility would increase, along with the lifetime incomes of less advantaged children. Those earnings could equal 10 times more than the cost of the programs themselves, suggesting that once the higher taxes paid by beneficiaries, and reduced need for government programs likely to accompany these higher incomes are taken into account, the programs would have a positive ratio of benefits to costs for the American taxpayer.

In “[How Much could We Improve Children’s Life Chances by Intervening Early and Often?](#)” Brookings Senior Fellow and Co-Director of the Center on Children and Families Isabel Sawhill and Senior Research Assistant Quentin Karpilow warn that while the potential is there, the biggest challenge to undertaking these types of interventions would be taking them to scale without diluting their effectiveness.

The [Social Genome Model](#) (SGM), a partnership between Brookings, Child Trends, and the Urban Institute, divides life into 6 distinct stages (family formation, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, transition to adulthood and adulthood) and then sets outcomes for each of those stages that, according to prior research, are predictive of later outcomes and eventual economic and social success. The success indicators are: being born to parents ready to raise a child; being school-ready by age 5; being socially and academically competent by age 11; being college- or career-ready by age 19; living independently, and graduating from college or having an equivalent income by age 29; and, ultimately, being middle class by middle age.



Using the SGM, Sawhill and Karpilow used several different interventions to see how much of the income gap between children born into advantaged and less advantaged families could be closed by the time they reached age 40. They found that only intervening at the early childhood level with a high quality preschool program was not enough because the effects faded out over time. Instead, intervening at several life stages -- and with both children and

parents -- was the most effective, with each intervention building on the next. The authors modeled a parent education program, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI), and then added a high quality preschool experience and 2 programs in middle childhood (Social Emotional Learning, and Success for All) and one in adolescence (Talent Development).

They found that those combined interventions reduced a 20-point gap in achieving middle class status by age 40 to a 6 point gap. Looking at the change in terms of mobility, under the baseline scenario, less than one in ten children born into the bottom income quintile climb into the top quintile by age 40; post-intervention, the figure doubles, jumping to nearly one in five.

These interventions also appear to pass a simple cost-benefit test, according to Sawhill and Karpilow. They estimate that the total cost per child for all of these programs combined is about \$20,000 but that the lifetime income of the average individual benefitting from these programs would increase by more than \$200,000, or ten times their cost. "While we have not yet analyzed the benefits to taxpayers, these would likely be positive as well, since society would gain from extra taxes paid on the affected individuals' extra income, from savings on benefits those individuals might otherwise receive, and from lower costs for crime, poor health, and related social problems," they write.

"Existing evidence-based programs can provide opportunity-enhancing supports at every life stage, and this need not cost more than what we are spending now, at least as measured over a child's life cycle. While we have yet to find a single intervention that will dramatically improve children's life chances, our research suggests that we don't need to wait for one to be invented in order to begin making real progress," they conclude.