Succeeding despite the obstacles: Closing the education gap for children in poverty

Margaret O'Brien Caughey, Sc.D.
Director, Maternal and Child Health Training Program
University of Texas School of Public Health
How can we close the achievement gap for children in poverty?

Poverty and Academic Achievement

Risk Factors

Resilience Factors
http://www.familybudgets.org
Children living in low-income and poor families, 2006–2011

Percentage of children in low-income and poor families by race/ethnicity, 2011

Poverty and Academic Achievement
The high school drop out rate is almost 4x higher among those who experience poverty.

Disparities in academic achievement start early.

Texas High School Graduation Rates, 2009

- White, non-Hispanic: 80%
- Black, non-Hispanic: 64%
- Hispanic: 64%
- Asian: 90%
- Dallas County: 57%

SOURCE: www.edweek.org/rc
% in lowest quartile at kindergarten entry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Risk Factors
A Social-Ecological Model

**Individual:** genotype, knowledge, beliefs, experience

**Interpersonal:** Family, friends, social network

**Organizational:** School, church, etc.

**Community:** Local culture, natural & built environment

**Policies, Laws, Other Cultures**
Poverty affects homes.
Low income homes have fewer resources

McCormick & Mason (1986) reported that 48% of families on public assistance reported having no alphabet books for their preschoolers, compared with only 3% of professional parents.
Poverty affects parenting

The stresses of poverty are associated with higher rates of harsh parenting and inconsistent discipline.
Stresses of Poverty → Less Sensitive Parenting → Altered Physiological Reactivity to Stress → Reduced cognitive functioning

Poverty affects children through a range of domains:

- Child Health
- Neighborhoods
Poverty affects children through a range of domains.
NEIGHBORHOODS
Resilience Factors
Many low-income families have strengths that should be acknowledged, celebrated, and capitalized upon.
Most low-income parents display sensitive and supportive parenting with their children.

Most low-income parents are highly invested in helping their children succeed in school.
Dallas Preschool Readiness Study Mothers
(N = 402)

- Child-oriented: 40%
- Directive: 41%
- Low involvement: 8%
- Harsh: 12%
Low income neighborhoods also have strengths that should be acknowledged and built upon.
How can we close the achievement gap for children in poverty?
A Social-Ecological Model

**Individual:** genotype, knowledge, beliefs, experience

**Interpersonal:** Family, friends, social network

**Organizational:** School, church, etc.

**Community:** Local culture, natural & built environment

**Policies, Laws, Other Cultures**
High Quality Preschool Programs Work
Head Start
A Social-Ecological Model

**Individual:** genotype, knowledge, beliefs, experience

**Interpersonal:** Family, friends, social network

**Organizational:** School, church, etc.

**Community:** Local culture, natural & built environment

**Policies, Laws, Other Cultures**
Community-Wide Interventions

Improving Community Resources

Prenatal to Three Initiative
San Mateo County, CA

- Distribute high quality books through multiple sites and community agencies
- Model reading behaviors/stress importance of reading routines
- Promote use of library and literacy programs

>70% increase in parent literacy behaviors

Improving Community Resources

Prenatal to Three Initiative
San Mateo County, CA

- Distribute high quality books through multiple sites and community agencies
- Model reading behaviors/stress importance of reading routines
- Promote use of library and literacy programs

>70% increase in parent literacy behaviors

A Social-Ecological Model

**Individual:** genotype, knowledge, beliefs, experience

**Interpersonal:** Family, friends, social network

**Organizational:** School, church, etc.

**Community:** Local culture, natural & built environment

**Policies, Laws, Other Cultures**
Policy-Level Interventions

Los Angeles Times
Obama to push for expansion of preschool programs
February 14, 2013 | By Kathleen Hennessy
Obama to push for expansion of preschool programs

February 14, 2013 | By Kathleen Hennessey
Closing the education gap: A call to action
Closing the education gap: A call to action

United We Serve
http://www.serve.gov/toolkits.asp

reading partners
one tutor. one child. infinite possibilities.
http://www.readingpartners.org/locations/dallas

PLACE AT THE TABLE
ONE NATION. UNDERFED.

http://www.takepart.com/place-at-the-table

FEEDING AMERICA
http://feedingamerica.org/
A call

United We Serve

http://www.serve.gov/toolkits.asp
http://www.readingpartners.org/locations/dallas

readingpartners

one tutor. one child. infinite possibilities.
Closing the education gap:
A call to action
“In an increasingly complex world, sometimes old questions require new answers.”