



Many factors outside of school influence a child's academic success or failure. Two of the largest external factors are poverty and family culture.

**Research suggests that poor children encounter obstacles that may adversely affect their development and learning:**

1. Students in poverty have less access to academic and social support outside of school.<sup>1</sup>
2. Living in poverty may negatively influence students' health, safety, and wellbeing, which negatively impact student learning and achievement.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>
3. Adverse conditions undermine the ability of parents and teachers to influence their schools and ensure that schools can best serve their interests.<sup>6,7</sup>

Pedro Noguera<sup>8</sup> a sociologist of education, argues that making bold assertions that poor children can achieve while doing nothing to address outside-of-school challenges is neither fair nor a sound basis for developing public policy.

Author Kay Hymowitz, meanwhile, argues that **family culture is just as important as income**.<sup>9</sup> She contends that a culture of high-quality educational habits is often not reinforced in the homes of low-income children. This argument parallels previous research:

1. Low-income parents spend less time reading with their children, a strong predictor of later academic success.<sup>10,11</sup>
2. Families in poverty have poorer health and quality of life outcomes.<sup>12,13</sup>
3. Cultural norms regarding child rearing and family structure can also influence children's development and later academic achievement.<sup>9</sup>

**Policies to improve educational and health outcomes must address factors both at school and at home. Research shows that success builds on success, and early childhood gains need to be supported by high quality investments that support children at home and at school.**<sup>14</sup>

High quality pre-kindergarten is one such investment. Pre-kindergarten improves the life course trajectory of at-risk kids, particularly when coupled with strong home and community "wrap-around" supports: Kids with access to these supports are more likely to succeed in school and hold living-wage jobs, are less reliant on social services, and are less likely to be arrested.<sup>15</sup>

This is why the national Promise Neighborhood movement and the Strive<sup>16</sup> initiative advocate for a "**civic infrastructure**" that coordinates resources for children in a cradle- to-career approach. Civic infrastructure has several key components:

- **A Shared Community Vision**, bringing together community stakeholders at every level (i.e., grass roots and grass tops) and across all sectors (from education to community to business and beyond) around a unified vision and goals.
- **Evidence Based Decision Making**, agreeing on which data points are meaningful indicators, and how we, as a community, can best support student success.
- **Collaborative Action**, bringing together those who can best influence the indicators that make a difference.
- **Investment & Sustainability**, requiring community ownership and involvement in the work to sustain it through inevitable ups, downs, and leadership changes.

**We can do a better job addressing the needs of at-risk children by fostering civic infrastructure and expanding accountability beyond teachers and schools. Children are products of their families, communities and schools. To foster student success, we must acknowledge and address the societal context in which our children are raised.**



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