The Early Childhood Launching Pad to School Readiness and School Success

There are extensive disparities in school readiness among young children growing up in poverty and their peers from higher-income families. Early preventative strategies based in traditional platforms such as home and early education settings have been shown to be modestly effective in reducing such poverty-related disparities, but questions remain as to whether such approaches are cost-effective and scalable. Unlike these prior efforts, the approach we will present in this panel has the potential to be transformational by making a substantial difference for children’s outcomes, and doing so at low cost and with broad reach to large numbers of low-income families.

First and foremost, our approach integrates primary and secondary prevention to address the diversity of low-income families. Both advocates and policymakers have long sought to prevent poverty-related disparities in health and education through enhancing interactive and responsive parenting behaviors, given numerous studies that have documented the critical positive impacts of parental warmth and responsiveness on children’s cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. At the same time, variation across families in the presence of psychosocial stressors (such as parental depression, parenting stress, and family conflict that can mitigate the effectiveness of parenting-focused interventions) necessitates flexibility in approach. Therefore, we will present a two-tiered approach consisting of a universal, low-intensity (primary) prevention for all low-income families and targeted, higher intensity (secondary) prevention for those with identified psychosocial stressors.

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