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New Report Offers Comprehensive Look at What Kids Need to Succeed As Adults

-- Identifies Factors Children Need to Develop to Navigate Life Successfully

CHICAGO (June 23) – Amid growing recognition that strong academic skills alone are not enough for young people to become successful adults, a new comprehensive [report](#) offers wide-ranging evidence to show what young people need to develop from preschool to young adulthood to succeed in college and career, have healthy relationships, be engaged citizens and make wise choices. It concludes that rich experiences combining action and reflection help children develop a set of critical skills, attitudes and behaviors. And it suggests that policies should aim to ensure that all children have consistent, supportive relationships and an abundance of these developmental experiences through activities inside and outside of school.

The report, "[Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework](#)" by the [University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research](#) (UChicago CCSR), is an unusually comprehensive look at what research, theory and practice identify as the building blocks for life success. It synthesizes knowledge from the fields of youth development, psychology, sociology, education and the cognitive sciences as well as insights from practitioners. [The Wallace Foundation](#) awarded a competitive grant to UChicago CCSR in 2013 to undertake the project, which included a review of relevant literature spanning decades as well as interviews with national experts in research, policy and practice, and young people and the adults who work with them in schools, programs and agencies throughout Chicago.

The report offers evidence to show how, where, and when the "key factors" to success develop from early childhood through young adulthood, emphasizing the kinds of experiences and supportive relationships that guide the positive development of these factors. Recognizing that there are no silver bullets to promoting social-emotional learning, the report emphasizes a range of factors that build on one another over time. It also emphasizes factors that are particularly malleable, as well as the age at which each of the key factors comes into prominence, offering adults the most promising window for positive intervention.

A key problem the report identifies is that disadvantaged youth often face extra challenges. For example, they often have fewer in-school and out-of-school opportunities for consistent, positive developmental experiences and relationships and face significant opportunity gaps to developing the essential skills to become productive adults.

<http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/about/staff/jenny-nagaoka>

“This new report underscores that in order to be poised for success as young adults, children need to acquire both content knowledge and a wide range of skills, attitudes and behaviors that develop throughout childhood and adolescence,” said Jenny Nagaoka, lead author and UChicago CCSR deputy director. “This report is a first step in guiding practitioners, policymakers, parents, and researchers toward fulfilling this wider vision, whether in reimagining how to coach a basketball team, reshaping policies in a local school district or selecting an afterschool program for one’s child. Ensuring that young people grow into successful young adults requires investments in their learning and development from early childhood to young adulthood.”

The report identifies three key factors children need to acquire for success in adulthood:

- *Agency* or the capacity to shape the course of one’s life rather than simply reacting to external forces.
- *Integrated identity* or a strong sense of who one is, which provides an internal compass for actively making decisions consistent with one’s values, beliefs and goals.
- *Competencies* or the abilities to be productive, effective and adaptable to the demands of different settings.

Those three factors rest on four “foundational components” that develop from early childhood through adulthood:

- *Self-regulation*, which is the awareness of oneself and one’s surroundings, and management of one’s attention, emotions and behaviors to achieve goals.
- *Knowledge and skills*, which are information and an understanding about oneself, other people and the world, and the ability to carry out tasks.
- *Mindsets*, which are beliefs and attitudes about oneself, the world and the interaction between the two. They are the lenses individuals use to process everyday experiences.
- *Values*, which are enduring, often culturally-defined, beliefs about what is good or bad and what is important in life.

The report also includes implications for educators, youth practitioners, parents and families:

- A narrow focus on content knowledge in isolation from the other foundational components can undermine learning and development.

- Taking a developmental lens is essential to ensuring that structures and practices meet the developmental needs of the young people being served.
- Ensuring *all* young people have access to a multitude of rich developmental experiences is imperative to their success.

It also contains implications for policymakers:

- Policies that put too great an emphasis on content knowledge and standardized tests create incentives for practitioners to see the development of content knowledge as the sole outcome of interest.
- Policies that promote all the components would help to create conditions that foster both the learning of academic content and the development of young people more holistically.
- Policymakers need to move beyond standardized test scores to consider other outcomes of interest; however, policymakers should proceed carefully with incorporating them into school accountability systems.

“A critical contribution of this report is to identify factors that are not fixed, opening the door for policies and practices that can promote their development in young people,” said Hilary Rhodes, senior research and evaluation officer at Wallace. “We hope the report builds understanding of children’s developmental needs at each stage, and lays the groundwork for strengthening knowledge about how these needs can be better met.”

The report can be downloaded for free at ccsr.uchicago.edu.

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The [University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research \(CCSR\)](http://www.ccsr.uchicago.edu) conducts research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. CCSR encourages the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school reform by identifying what matters for student success and school improvement, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is an independent national foundation dedicated to fostering improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. It seeks to catalyze broad impact by supporting the development, testing and sharing of new solutions and effective practices. At www.wallacefoundation.org, the Foundation maintains an online library about what it has learned, including knowledge from its current efforts aimed at: strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement; helping selected cities make good afterschool programs available to more children; expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens; providing high-quality summer learning programs to disadvantaged children; enriching and expanding the school day in ways that benefit students; and helping arts organizations to build their audiences.