



**CENTER FOR THE ECONOMICS
OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

The University of Chicago

FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Center for the Economics of Human Development strives to understand the critical periods in life when the skills necessary for human flourishing are formed.

The skills acquired throughout life have the power to transform many facets of the life course. Still, there remain vast disparities in opportunities and outcomes which most adversely affect those in under-resourced groups. Our research generates new methods and frameworks that identify and address unequal allocation of opportunity embedded in our social and economic systems.

Investing in human capital is vital to the health of our communities and our economy. Our work deepens understanding of the origin and evolution of the transformative skills that one needs to achieve their fullest potential. This innovative research lays the necessary foundation for the development of equitable and efficient public policies creating pathways towards a flourishing and functioning society.

We know that by creating and shaping human capabilities, we can give *all* people the opportunity for advancement.



James J. Heckman



ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center synthesizes a comprehensive array of research projects that aim to identify and explore the circumstances under which people develop the skills necessary to thrive in the current economy and achieve their fullest potential. This research, guided by Nobel laureate James J. Heckman, brings together top-tier researchers to contribute to work that promotes a thorough empirical understanding of human flourishing, early childhood interventions, social mobility, and creating and measuring skills.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENT

The Center's ongoing evaluations of iconic early childhood interventions—such as the Perry Preschool Program, Carolina Abecedarian Project, Jamaica Reach Up and its global replications—have demonstrated the substantial positive effects that early environmental enrichment has on a range of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Not only do these interventions enrich the early environments of children, particularly those born into under-resourced families, their effects persist and permeate across generations long after the interventions have ended, shaping outcomes in education, employment, and well-being. Guided by the notion that the *relationships* between parents and their children constitute the true meaning of productive investment, an entire genre of programs featuring home visit components seek to teach caregivers how to best interact with and engage their children. The Center's design and ongoing analysis of ChinaREACH, a home visiting program modeled after Jamaica Reach Up, shows significant impact on skills in children, with language and cognitive skills affected most strongly. Findings demonstrate that the impacts are largely determined by the quality of interactions between the child, the parent, and the home visitor.

SKILL FORMATION

Early mastery of cognitive and non-cognitive skills makes learning at later ages more efficient, easier, and more likely to continue. Still, educational policy in the U.S. and other OECD countries relies on achievement tests to assess students and educational systems, failing to capture the important character skills required for one to flourish in school and in life. Until recently, non-cognitive skills were ignored in modern education policy despite their value in the labor market, school, and other domains. These qualities—as well as attributes such as conscientiousness, perseverance, sociability, and curiosity—have significant positive impacts on education, employment, health, and participation in risky activities. Recent research at the Center demonstrates that these skills can be measured and improved through educational interventions. The Center has partnered with economists, psychologists, and educators in Asia, Europe, and the U.S. to conduct field experiments, unify understanding, and refine the measurement of skills necessary to achieve meaningful life outcomes. This research will generate novel, foundational knowledge that promotes effective educational interventions for children from diverse environments and different levels of advantage.

INEQUALITY AND INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY

The Center's ongoing research reveals that, despite Denmark's extensive welfare state, family background plays a crucial role in shaping inequality and mobility, suggesting that the origins of inequality lie deeper than income redistribution and low-cost access to services. The accident of birth is a principle driver of economic inequality. Children born into disadvantaged families and neighborhoods are more likely to carry that disadvantage throughout their lives, with low lifetime earnings and a high likelihood of issues, including poor health, teenage pregnancy, and crime. Equality of opportunity is often celebrated, but rather than providing it later in life through simple redistribution and social inclusion, it is predistribution—improving the lives of disadvantaged children first—that is far more effective in promoting economic efficiency, workforce productivity, and social mobility. Findings from Denmark will help us explore the effectiveness of the U.S. implementing free childcare, free tuition, universal school quality, and access to health care, and will reveal insights into how governmental policy can truly mitigate inequity.

CENTER IMPACT

The Center is dedicated to driving the national conversation on human flourishing and social mobility by guiding top-tier research into the hands of scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and households. Professor Heckman has produced over 400 publications to date, and stands as a pillar in the research community as the second most-cited economist in the world. A trusted voice in the policy community, Professor Heckman serves on many prominent advisory committees including Illinois' Educational Success Committee organized by Governor J.B. Pritzker, which aims to give every child in the state a quality education regardless of race, zip code, or income. The Center regularly disseminates this work to policymakers and practitioners dedicated to the early and equal development of human potential through the Heckman Equation initiative (heckman-equation.org). Further demonstrating our impact, the mainstream global media, including The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and The Economist, reference and highlight the Center's research over 200 times annually.

These efforts are amplified through a steadily expanding online presence. The Center's website provides the latest news, events, working papers, and research briefs to over 135,000 unique web visitors annually. In addition, the Center engages a growing audience of nearly 3 million followers across Facebook and Twitter, delivering real-time updates on cutting-edge research and activities that foster

intellectual exchange. Our collection of almost 500 original YouTube videos is watched by nearly 150,000 subscribers. These videos showcase the robust activities produced by the Center, including original interviews with leading scholars and the exchange of novel ideas through conferences, workshops, and lectures. Finally, a thriving repository of over 400 papers—addressing topics spanning neighborhood effects to refugee resettlement—are hosted through the Center's working paper series, and their dissemination has accumulated more than 12,000 abstract views and over 4,000 downloads.

As the Center looks to the future, it recognizes the importance of training the next generation. In addition to educating and mentoring economics graduate students throughout his tenure as the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor in Economics at the University of Chicago, Professor Heckman has directly trained countless post- and predoctoral scholars, undergraduates, and high school students at the Center. Looking beyond campus, we have organized global summer satellite programs that provide students intensive training in the study of inequality. Since 2012, the Center has trained over 800 undergraduate and graduate students at over 20 Summer Schools on Socioeconomic Inequality held in Chicago, China, England, Germany, Norway, and Russia. These programs stimulate fruitful, ongoing research exchanges among students and faculty, and form partnerships that strengthen our research network.

The Center acts as a catalyst for intellectual dialogue across disciplines, assembling a network of researchers with the shared mission of deepening the understanding of the multiplicity of cognitive and non-cognitive skills required for one to achieve their fullest potential. The Center is uniquely equipped to inform the research community, guided by renowned intellectual leadership in close proximity to Chicago's distinguished faculty, and in close collaboration with interdisciplinary associations worldwide. We host over 20 visitors annually, forming new collaborations and broadening the local research landscape. The research generated here equips academics, practitioners, and policymakers with the breadth of knowledge necessary to responsibly promote equality of opportunity for even the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, as effective advocacy must be grounded in rigorous empirical research.

INVEST IN IMPACT

The Center invites those who seek to champion rigorous scholarship and cultivate effective public policies that address the roots of inequality to support our research and advance the economics of human flourishing. **Gifts of any size make a tremendous impact.** Your philanthropic support would be a powerful statement of commitment to national change in early childhood investments. Together, we can drive forward change inspired and evidenced by the unequivocal link between quality empirical research and equitable policy.

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