

Innovating to End Urban Poverty Conference

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Panel 4: What role people Summary

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Respondents

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Two Policies to Boost School Readiness

Expand Boston Pre-K program

- Focus on ways in which we can provide direct services to kids, as well as support families to help children become more school ready and close the academic gap in school entry between high- and low-income students.
- Pre-K program proven through rigorous evaluation, and scaled up to a significant level.
- Program in poor urban school district: combines a proven math curriculum, literacy curriculum, and behavioral development program.
- Program has extensive professional development and an extensive coaching system.
- Play-based setting: four-year-olds learn best through play.
- Academic skills best predict future school success.

Provide income support for families with children under five

- Larger impacts for student achievement, income, and early achievement.
- Families are important for young children, as their brain is developing very quickly.
- Re-allocate funds to families with children under five, rather than families with kids above the age of five.
- If we can get new money, we can think of expanding existing programs in ways that first increase payments to low-income families with young children.

Former Prisoners and Disadvantaged Youth: Changing Outlook and Opportunity

Program for former prisoners

- Transitional jobs: placement in repair, recycling, maintenance, and janitorial jobs (e.g., transitional jobs programs in New York City and in the Midwest, which offered 8- to 10-week placements for participants). Programs led to large increases in employment. But

after the first year, all of the employment impacts went away, so they seem to be due entirely to the transitional jobs programs.

- Transition to unsubsidized work may be difficult often times: possibly because transitional jobs may be too short, may not include skill building, and perhaps were meant to just demonstrate employability. Some of the agencies had trouble finding employers willing to hire former prisoners.
- Individual barriers that former prisoners may face: substance abuse, mental health issues, and more.
- The effect of non-cognitive skills (e.g. moral reasoning, impulsivity, aggression, motivation, conventionality, and so on) on later outcomes are as large or larger than the effects of typically used cognitive measures, like IQ.
- Earning supplements, like expanded Earned Income Tax Credit, especially if former prisoners land in unsubsidized jobs that are very low paying.

Disadvantaged youth

- YouthBuild provides vocational training, mostly construction, education and other services to disadvantaged youth ages 16 to 24. Emphasis on youth leadership; change in opportunity and mindset. YouthBuild screens for readiness to change, not just previous criminal or arrest records, when determining which type of youth will make it through the program.
- Stronger connection to post-secondary education: GED Bridge at LaGuardia Community College – contextualized curriculum for health and business. Taught more like a college course. College professors came in and talk about what it takes to move on from the GED (Generational Educational Development) to college enrollment.

Discussion

- High hopes among disadvantaged youth, but how do we get children to realize that the future is relevant to now? The future starts now, not later.
- If you give people a metaphor, you ask them to think about their possible selves at the same time they are looking at a path, which is one way of thinking about how you move on the road of life...you locomote. No one sits down on the road of life.
- If you keep raising your hand, you keep coming after class, you keep trying again, your teacher will be able to do a better job than if you do not come to class, do not do your homework, or are not asking questions.
- Electronic waste recycling is an underdeveloped industry.
- If people do not have a secure place to live, particularly if they have a substance abuse, if their sobriety is not supported where they live, they will not show up to work on time nor will they be able to hold a job. It is difficult for people to have a job if they do not know where they are going to sleep.
- High cultural belief in the U.S. regarding education: if it is not one-on-one, it is not of value because we are highly individualistic. However, there is a lot of power in group processes, in looking around you and seeing that it is hard for others too.
- Prisons as mental health providers: our jail system is our mental health care system.