A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty: A Report from the National Academy of Sciences

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Although child poverty rates have fallen by half in the past 50 years, 13% of U.S. children (9.7 million in all) live in families with incomes below the poverty line. Drawing from a recently released National Academy report on child poverty, I briefly summarize causal evidence on the consequences of poverty for children’s development as well as research on the impacts of anti-poverty programs such as food stamps and the Earned Income Tax Credit on development. I then review poverty reduction and employment changes for a variety of policy approaches to reducing child poverty by half in the next ten years.

Greg J. Duncan is a Distinguished Professor at the School of Education at the University of California Irvine. He spent the first 25 years of his career at the University of Michigan working on and ultimately directing the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data collection project. Since 1968, the PSID has collected economic, demographic, health, behavior and attainment data from a representative sample of U.S. individuals and the households in which they reside. With these and other data he has studied the economic mobility of the U.S. population, both within and across generations, with a particular focus on low-income families. More specifically, he has investigated the roles families, peers, neighborhoods and public policy play in affecting the life chances of children and adolescents. Professor Duncan’s research has highlighted the importance of early childhood as a sensitive period for the damaging influences of economic deprivation as well as for the beneficial impacts of policy-induced income increases for working families. The focus of his more recent research has shifted from these environmental influences to the comparative importance of the skills and behaviors developed during childhood. In particular, he has sought to understand the relative importance of early academic skills, cognitive and emotional self-regulation, and health in promoting children’s eventual success in school and the labor market. Currently, he is part of a team conducting a random-assignment trial assessing impacts of income supplements on the cognitive development of infants born to poor mothers in four diverse U.S. communities.

He was elected president of the Population Association of America for 2008 and president of the Society for Research in Child Development for 2009-2011. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2001 and to the National Academy of Sciences in 2010. In 2013, he was awarded the Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize. In 2014 he became the Kenneth Boulding Fellow of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. In 2015, he received the Society for Research in Child Development Award for Distinguished Contributions to Public Policy and Practice in Child Development.

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