REDDUCING POVERTY IN CALIFORNIA

...Permanently

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If California were to seriously commit to equalizing opportunity and reducing poverty, how might that commitment best be realized?

This is of course a hypothetical question, as there is no evidence that California is poised to make such a serious commitment, nor have many other states gone much beyond the usual lip-service proclamations. There are many reasons for California’s complacency, but an important one is that most people think that poverty is intractable and that viable solutions to it simply don’t exist.

When Californians know what needs to be done, they tend to go forward and get it done. When, for example, the state’s roads are in disrepair, there are rarely paralyzing debates about exactly how to go about fixing them; instead we proceed with the needed repairs as soon as the funds to do so are appropriated. The same type of sure and certain prescription might appear to be unavailable when it comes to reducing poverty. It is hard not to be overwhelmed by the cacophony of voices yielding a thick stream of narrow-gauge interventions, new evaluations, and piecemeal proposals.1

Although the research literature on poverty is indeed large and may seem confusing, recent advances have in fact been so fundamental that it is now possible to develop a science-based response to poverty. In the past, the causes of poverty were not well understood, and major interventions, such as the War on Poverty, had to be built more on hunch than science. It is an altogether different matter now. The causes of poverty are well established, and the effects of many possible policy responses to poverty are likewise well established. The simple purpose of this essay is to assemble these advances into a coherent plan that would, if implemented, reduce poverty in California substantially.

A High-Poverty State

In any discussion of poverty in California, perhaps the most important point to be made is that we have much of it, indeed likely more than in any other state in the United States.2 The California Poverty Measure (CPM), a measure that improves on the Census Bureau’s supplemental poverty measure, indicates that 22.0 percent of all Californians are living in poverty.3 This poverty is often very extreme. In fact, 6.1 percent of California’s population lives in “deep poverty,” meaning that their family income is less than 50 percent of the poverty threshold.4 Does it follow that California’s current poverty policy, understood narrowly as the many programs making up the safety net, has failed us? Not at all. The “mechanical” effects of state and federal benefits in pushing family income above the poverty threshold are in fact quite large. If all safety-net benefits were suddenly eliminated (CalFresh, CalWORKs, tax credits, school meals, housing subsidies, SSI, Social Security), the percentage of California’s population in poverty would increase by a full 12.9 points (from 22.0 percent to 34.9 percent).5 This result makes it clear that, despite the many criticisms leveled against the safety net, it is doing real and substantial poverty-reducing work in its current form. To be sure, the state’s poverty population remains the largest in the country even after our state’s safety net is applied, but that should not obscure the equally important point that, absent the safety net, the poverty population would be far larger.

The Role of Evidence and Values in Poverty Policy

What, then, might be done to reduce California’s unusually high poverty rate? We have no interest in issuing an academic report about policies that will never be undertaken. We have much interest, by contrast, in laying out policies and programs that would reduce poverty substantially and garner public support. In the plan presented here, we have accordingly taken very seriously the key values and commitments that are widely shared within the United States, values and commitments that affect the types of programs that we are likely to embrace and call our
own. There is little point, for example, in attempting to incorporate programs or policies that rest on a wholly foreign set of values, even if those programs or policies are proven poverty-reducers. It is not simply that such programs would likely be opposed by many Californians and therefore never come to fruition. Even if they were somehow implemented, the resulting policies would never feel like our own, would not mesh well with our existing institutions, and would likely be mired in controversy from the start.

This line of reasoning suggests a set of reforms that express our shared commitment to the principles of equal opportunity and the value of work. Although the United States is a heterogeneous country with many competing commitments, there is much evidence indicating that these two commitments are widely accepted and would accordingly serve well as the foundation for safety-net reform. We review each in turn below.

**Equal opportunity**: However difficult to achieve, the principle of equal opportunity has long figured prominently in American discourse, indeed it is even laid out in drafts of the country's founding documents. This principle implies that all children, those from rich and poor families alike, should have a meaningful opportunity to develop their talents and capacities. The equal opportunity plan, which we lay out below, accordingly comprises a comprehensive sequence of interventions that level the playing field by allowing poor children the same access to opportunities (e.g., opportunities for high-quality preschool) that are readily available to their better-off counterparts.

**Making work pay**: If the commitment to equal opportunity is deeply cherished, so too is the principle that everyone should work (insofar as they are able to do so) and that hard work should pay off. In 1996, the U.S. welfare system was revamped to encourage employment and reduce welfare dependency, a reform that was followed by a substantial decline in the size of the nonworking poor population. If a new round of safety-net reforms is consonant with this commitment to work and making work pay, it will again express our deepest values and garner widespread support. We will propose below a set of legal and tax reforms that may be understood as a particular rendition of this commitment.

There is of course a wide range of interventions on offer within the context of these two constraints. At the behest of GRACE Inc., a comprehensive review of these interventions was recently undertaken, with the objective to identify those for which the evidence was unusually clear and compelling. For the most part, the resulting proposals entail building on California’s existing safety net, in effect ramping up those programs for which the evidence is strong. That is, rather than assembling some haphazard collection of programs that have been shown to work, our objective is to choose from among such successful programs only those that integrate well with California’s existing programs. We have also sought to build on and exploit various reforms under way in California (e.g., health care reform, Local Control Funding Formula). The goal, in short, is to build a comprehensive reform package that rests on programs backed by the best science, that integrates seamlessly with the existing safety net, and that builds on initiatives already in play.

This essay presents in summary form the package of reforms that emerged out of this review and that, taken together, offer an unprecedented opportunity to reduce poverty in California now and into the future. The package is motivated by a commitment to equalize access to investments in skills and to ensure that those who work hard will not be in poverty.

**Reducing Poverty by Equalizing Opportunity**

The literature on poverty reveals a growing consensus that cost-effective policy should (a) identify the key junctures in the life course that determine the development of skills and capacities and (b) intervene at those junctures in ways that offset the disadvantages facing low-income children. The resulting reforms are founded on a commitment to ensure that opportunities to develop capacities and invest in skills (“human capital”) are available to all children. It is of course difficult to equalize opportunities fully and completely because children born into middle-class families will inevitably have access to better health care, better child care, better schools, and all manner of other advantages that will ultimately assist them in the labor market. The cumulative effect of such advantages can nonetheless be reduced with compensatory programs targeted to key junctures when capacities are being formed or decisions are being made. Although this approach naturally leads one to early interventions, there are also critical junctures in the later life course that are cost-effective to target.

We briefly review this approach by laying out cost-effective interventions at each successive stage of the life course. We start with home visiting programs that intervene very early in the life course (even prenatally); we then turn to early education for preschool children; we follow with a targeted set of interventions for school-age children and young adults; and we conclude by discussing a set of legal and tax reforms that reduce discrimination and (partly) compensate for barriers to opportunity confronted early in life.

**Home Visiting Programs**

We begin, then, by discussing home visiting programs oriented toward improving child and adult health practices, improving parenting, and providing referrals to available social services. These programs are built around home visits by nurses or trained staff who provide at-risk mothers with guidance on (a) diet and other prenatal practices, (b) the child’s health and development, and (c) parenting. The main rationale for such programs is that they identify at-risk children early on, intervene before problems cascade into much larger ones, and thereby lead to improved health, parenting, and cognitive development in ways that have substantial long-term benefits.

These programs emerge from the growing evidence that prenatal and early childhood experiences affect neural functions and structures that in turn shape future cognitive, social, emotional, and health outcomes. Even at 18 months old, children from poorer households are much slower at identifying pictures of simple words, such as “dog” or “ball.” By kindergarten, there is a substantial gap between poor and middle-class children in reading skills (e.g., recognizing letters), math skills (e.g., count-
reduced emergency medical care, and improved developmental
pattern is one of reduced child abuse, increased home safety,
specifics of the results differ across NFP and HFA, the general
already been adopted by the California Home Visiting Program.
Healthy Families America (HFA), as these two programs have
research evaluating the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and
home visiting models as evidence-based, but we focus here on
of Health and Human Services has designated a number of
randomized controlled trials and other high-quality research
intervene early in ways that will reduce these consequences. The
The case for home visiting programs is backed by a large body
of randomized controlled trials and other high-quality research that demonstrates their effectiveness. The U.S. Department
health visiting approach rests on precisely this argument.
The health benefits of NFP and HFA are clear. Although the
specifies of the results differ across NFP and HFA, the general
pattern is one of reduced child abuse, increased home safety,
reduced emergency medical care, and improved developmental
outcomes. The research evidence on cognitive development and
school readiness is also strong. The children participating
in home visiting programs are more attentive, regulate their
behavior better, and develop better language skills. In a well-
known randomized controlled trial, 6-year-olds enrolled in an
NFP program “demonstrated higher intellectual functioning
and receptive vocabulary scores…and had fewer behavioral
problems,” when compared with children treated with minimal
support services.

The home visiting landscape in California is complicated,
however, by virtue of a large number of overlapping providers,
funding sources, and target populations. The current tapestry of
programs is a patchwork affair that misses some at-risk families
and is often focused on narrowly delineated health problems
rather than the larger family situation. The home visiting pro-
gram might accordingly be reformed by expanding coverage and
providing a broader range of family services (e.g., linking fami-
lies to social services). Although an exact estimate of unmet
need is unavailable, the best data suggest that approximately
465,000 California families with children up to age 5 are in
CPM poverty, have young children, and are not currently being
served by the California Home Visiting Program or the Early
Start Program.

The skeptic might worry that home visiting programs
address symptoms rather than causes and therefore do not cut
to the heart of California’s poverty problem. In evaluating this
claim, it is useful to distinguish between (a) the poverty aris-
ing from problems with labor supply (e.g., underinvestment
in human capital) and (b) the poverty arising from problems
on the demand side (e.g., shortage of jobs, excess of low-wage
jobs). The home visiting program of course addresses the supply
side of the problem. That is, insofar as poverty in its unchecked
form leads to various health, cognitive, and other developmen-
tal problems, a home visiting program has protective effects
that can ultimately improve the capacity of at-risk children to
make human capital investments (e.g., investments in a col-
lege education). If there are enough high-quality training slots
to accommodate this new capacity for investment (e.g., enough
college scholarships), then home visiting programs will work
to reduce the number of low-skill workers and increase the
number of high-skill workers. The poverty rate will accordingly
be reduced, not just because the children from home visiting
programs are more likely to develop the skills that bring about
higher wages, but also because there will be fewer low-skill
workers and hence less in the way of wage-reducing competi-
tion among them. It follows that a home visiting program can be
understood as a systemic response to California’s poverty.

We are of course assuming here that a ramped-up home visit-
ing program is ultimately paired with a ramped-up commitment
to providing the education (e.g., vocational training, college)
that the new demand for human capital investment will make
necessary. Put differently, a successful home visiting program
will create a new bulge at the bottom of the training pipeline,
a bulge that some 15 years later will need to be met by increas-
ing opportunities at the top of that pipeline (e.g., high-quality
college slots, high-quality vocational training slots). The more
proximate need, of course, will be to develop the new capacities
that will emerge in the middle of this pipeline. If an expanded
home visiting program yields the expected health and cognitive
gains for very young children, the logical follow-up is to cultivate
those gains by increasing opportunities to participate in early
childhood education. We therefore turn next to a discussion of
early childhood education programs and how they might indeed
be “ramped up.”

Early Childhood Education
The home visiting program arguably takes the early-intervention
approach to its logical limit by intervening prenatally (and then
continuing services up to age 5). Although early childhood edu-
cation (ECE) programs of course start after birth, they are still
chiefly understood as a classic early intervention approach. The
empirical rationale for these programs is much the same as that
for home visiting: The available evidence suggests that key cog-
nitive and behavioral inequalities are typically established before
children begin formal schooling and sometimes do not increase
all that much thereafter. The income gap in achievement tests,
for example, is already very large when children enter kinder-
garten and remains much the same size as children progress
through elementary school. The purpose of ECE is to take up
where home visiting programs left off by providing the early
experiences, stimulation, and training that can prevent such a
large gap from emerging before children enter kindergarten.

The evidence on behalf of ECE is strong, but not without
some complexities. In discussing this literature, the standard
and natural starting place is the now-famous evidence on two
intensive and small-scale programs, the Perry Preschool and
Abecedarian programs. The Perry Preschool study was based
on an experiment with random assignment of low-income
African-American children to either the experimental condition
(attending the Perry Preschool) or a control group that entered
kindergarten at age 5. In the experimental condition, children
attended preschool from ages 3 to 5, with classes meeting 2.5
hours per day for five days per week. The program included
weekly home visits with the children and their parents (and in
this regard may be understood as an amalgam of home visit-
programs here. As the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) is
implemented in California, children from disadvantaged fami-
lies may have increased access to many of these programs, thus
equalizing opportunities within the later life course.

This is not to suggest that California should rely exclusively on
the changes that the LCFF should bring about. The State would
do well to additionally exploit a newer class of interventions that,
by building on existing programs, offer further opportunities for
substantial returns at very low cost. The simple insight behind
these interventions is that many key investments (e.g., going to
college) require students to overcome entrenched impediments to
good decision making and follow-through.27 These impediments
can be overcome with informational and social-psychological
interventions that have been rigorously tested and can now be
incorporated into California’s existing programming at low cost:

A social-psychological intervention: A series of brief training
exercises can reverse debilitating beliefs about capacities and
lead to sizable and long-lasting gains in academic achieve-
ment.28

Informational support: By providing better information and
waiving application fees, low-income students with a record
of superior achievement will apply to and attend colleges that
are well matched to their capacities and talents.29

A text-messaging intervention: A low-cost program of person-
alized (but automated) text messages can increase college
attendance among low-income students.30

Although our natural instinct is to assume that big problems
require big institutional reforms, this class of interventions
instead proceeds from the recognition that big problems are
sometimes amenable to highly targeted and narrow-gauge solu-
tions.

The payoff to the foregoing interventions (per dollar invested)
is likely as large as the payoff to high-quality early childhood edu-
cation.31 To be sure, there is no disputing that early childhood
education yields a higher payoff than many late interventions
(e.g., conventional job training programs), but it does not follow
that it yields a higher payoff than all of them.32 It also bears noting
that, while the late interventions mentioned here have compel-
lung evidence behind them, a host of others also hold promise
and might be developed into a fuller suite of late interventions.33

We have to this point discussed (a) the effects of the LCFF
in equalizing school funding, and (b) some additional late inter-
ventions that may be usefully layered on top of LCFF-induced
changes. These two classes of reforms work in the main to pro-
vide higher-quality schooling to disadvantaged children and
thereby equalize access to college. It is of course also important to
develop a third class of late interventions that equalize access to
jobs that do not require a college education. Although job training
programs are sometimes represented as the prototypic low-return
investment, the latest evidence suggests that these programs can
have high payoff when training is targeted to expanding sectors of
the economy. Because community colleges have become the
center of contemporary workforce development, a shift to such “sectoral programs” may be best promoted by developing new funding formulas that incentivize community colleges to carry out training in high-demand fields.

Making Work Pay

The foregoing reforms, which focus on upgrading the skills and capacities of California’s labor force, might be criticized for ignoring the role of low-paying jobs in generating poverty. After all, if the main problem is that jobs just don’t pay enough, shouldn’t we take the bull by the horns and find a way to increase pay directly?

This claim is misleading insofar as it implies that the pay attached to jobs can be affected only by directly legislating it. We can also affect pay indirectly by changing the relative supply of low-skill and high-skill labor. If a labor-supply approach were implemented and allowed children from low-income families to better develop their capacities and skills, a growing number of workers would exit the low-skill sector, thus increasing their own wages as well as tamping down wage-lowering competition among those still in that sector. As the low-skill sector thins out, employers will have to pay more for the remaining laborers, which will induce them to refocus on the “high road” of automation and allow California to move more fully into a high-skill niche.

This line of reasoning makes it clear that wages in the low-skill sector are unduly low because the sector is flooded with workers who have not had a full and open opportunity to secure higher skills. The approaches discussed in the prior sections are intended to equalize such opportunities: We need to expand home visiting programs because we want all children, no matter how rich or poor their parents, to be raised in environments that protect their health and develop their capacities; we need to expand early childhood education because we want all children, no matter how rich or poor their parents, to be raised in environments in which those capacities are cultivated and have an opportunity to flourish; and we turn to late childhood interventions because we want all children, no matter how rich or poor their parents, to have full and complete access to college or other training opportunities. It will of course take more time than we would like for these opportunity-equalizing programs to bear fruit. If tax credits are applied now, we can immediately raise the pay of low-skill workers and thereby compensate, if only partially, for the reduced opportunities that most of them faced earlier in their lives. Although the need for such wage support will lessen as soon as opportunities are equalized, there is a pressing need to prop up wages now given that the low-skill sector is flooded with workers who did not have many opportunities.

The two most obvious approaches to “making work pay” entail directly supplementing the income of low-wage workers via the minimum wage or the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Because there are ongoing efforts to further raise California’s minimum wage, and because these efforts, even if wildly successful, will not reduce poverty by nearly the necessary amount, our comments below will focus on the possibility of a parallel effort to increase the EITC. To date, 26 states have their own state-funded EITCs, usually taking the simple form of a fixed percentage of the federal credit. If the federal EITC were supplemented by 10 percent, California would be a “middle-of-the-pack” state (relative to other states currently providing supplementation). Although a good case could be made for a yet more substantial supplement, the modest one recommended here rests on the likelihood that the federal EITC will be increased in the near future.

This recommendation is grounded in the now-overwhelming evidence that the EITC increases employment and earnings. When the EITC has been expanded, the increases in employment among families with children are quite substantial, especially among those with female family heads. The downstream benefits of the EITC are likewise impressive: The EITC improves the mental and physical health of mothers, reduces the likelihood of low birth weights, improves performance on cognitive tests, and increases college enrollment. The extra money that the EITC delivers to parents makes it into a supply-side intervention as well. When parental income is increased, children are raised in healthier and less stressful circumstances, which in turn positions them to make more substantial human capital investments. This is why Hilary Hoynes recently concluded that the EITC may “ultimately be judged one of the most successful labor market innovations in U.S. history.”

Does it follow that an expanded EITC could fully solve California’s poverty problem? This seems unlikely. If an EITC supplement were adopted in California, many families in deep poverty would simply not benefit from it. From its inception, the EITC has been intended to incentivize work, which means that families without any employed workers will not directly benefit from it. The ongoing rise of nonworking poverty would therefore go unaddressed by an EITC-based reform. It follows that, insofar as a state EITC were adopted, it should be coupled with other reforms (e.g., increased CalWORKs funding) that assist those in even more profound need.

This part of the equal opportunity plan, unlike the two foregoing parts (i.e., home visiting, early childhood education), thus relies on cash transfers or tax credits. Are such transfers or credits difficult to reconcile with core U.S. values? Absolutely not. The EITC is consistent with the country’s values not just because it ensures that “work pays” but also because it compensates for the reduced opportunities that most recipients faced earlier in their lives. This is not, however, the only way in which income transfers are opportunity-equalizing interventions. The EITC and CalWORKS also equalize opportunities for the next generation: That is, by raising the income of poor families, the EITC and CalWORKS act to level the playing field for the children raised in these families. There is growing evidence that, when income is transferred to poor families, the children in these families ultimately grow up healthier, have higher earnings, and work longer hours.

It also bears noting that any meaningful commitment to equal opportunity should go beyond such transfers and credits by addressing the legal and institutional sources of poverty. The careful reader will note that—to this point—our discussion has followed convention by conflating anti-poverty policy with safety net policy. This conflation, however conventional,
deeply problematic. After all, wages and unemployment are also directly affected by a host of legal and institutional practices that are quite unrelated to the safety net itself, practices that lead to (a) an especially high risk of incarceration for children born into poverty (notably African Americans), and (b) employment discrimination against mothers, members of some racial groups, undocumented immigrants, and the formerly incarcerated. These various forms of discrimination, each of which is inconsistent with a commitment to equal opportunity, can be addressed through legal reform and improved enforcement (some of which can be implemented at the state level).

Although we have focused much of our commentary on safety net reform, this legal and institutional reform cuts to the heart of any commitment to equal opportunity and must accordingly be understood as central to any meaningful equal opportunity plan. The available evidence, which suggests such reform would dramatically raise employment and wages in high-poverty populations, speaks to the power of policies that address causes (e.g., discrimination) rather than symptoms (e.g., low pay, unemployment). 43

Conclusions
We started this essay by noting that California’s poverty rate, which now stands at 22.0 percent, is higher than that of any other state. Worse yet, the poverty rate for high-school dropouts is a shocking 53.9 percent, a rate over five times higher than that for college graduates. The safety net has of course stepped up to the challenge by substantially reducing poverty relative to what would have prevailed in its absence. That said, even after the safety net has done all its important work, we are left with more than one in five Californians in poverty and the highest poverty rate in the country.

Why hasn’t this dismal state of affairs led to concerted action and the development of a new antipoverty plan? There are, to be sure, many reasons why poverty hasn’t been taken on, but an especially important one is that we haven’t known how to do so in a way that’s both backed by science and consistent with our beliefs about how a safety net should work. The state has therefore adopted a business-as-usual stance in which safety-net funding plods along, the poverty research industry plods along, and there is but a vague and distant hope that a magic-bullet solution will ultimately present itself.

We do not need to wait any longer. The main purpose of our essay has been to describe just how far the relevant science has come and to craft an antipoverty program rooted in that science. Although we do not mean to suggest that the evidence on all issues is clear-cut, there is a growing consensus around a two-pronged approach that combines opportunity-equalizing and wage-raising reforms. 45

This approach is well-tested, yields returns in excess of the investments, is consistent with our beliefs about how safety nets should work, integrates well with existing programs in California, and can be delivered with a centralized or decentralized (e.g., Promise Neighborhood) approach. The resulting program is not about treating symptoms, not about providing short-term relief, and certainly not about charity. It is about building a training system, labor market, and economy that provide opportunities for everyone and that ensure decent rewards for hard work. Because the proposed supply-side and tax-credit reforms treat the upstream causes of poverty, they will bring about a permanent reduction in the size of the poverty population and reduce future demands on the safety net. The poverty population will permanently shrink because low-income children will have new opportunities to develop capacities and make high-payoff investments in skills. By virtue of these opportunities, children from low-income families will no longer be mired in the low-wage sector, which not only raises their own wages but also reduces wage-lowering competition among the shrinking number of workers who do remain in that sector.

The evidence behind this program is strong, but it is not just evidence alone that recommends it. It is also attractive because, unlike some safety-net programs and interventions, it comports well with the country’s long-standing commitment to equalizing opportunity and ensuring that hard work pays off. We too often embrace the latest flavor-of-the-day programs simply because they work and happen to have supporters. This is surely understandable: After all, only rarely does any poverty-reducing program have much support, so we’re loath to be all that principled when one finally does. The great virtue, however, of a more principled approach is that it lays out our commitments clearly and allows us to build our institutions in defense of them. The equal opportunity plan reminds us that we’re committed to opportunity for all children and that we’ll intervene aggressively whenever that commitment is circumvented. When our safety net tells a simple story in this way, it becomes a cherished institution that we hold near and dear, an institution that makes sense to us and that we’re especially willing to defend. ■
Endnotes


4. Bohn, Sarah, Caroline Danielson, Matt Levin, Marybeth Mattingly, and Christopher Wimer. 2013. The California Poverty Measure: A New Look at the Social Safety Net. San Francisco: The Public Policy Institute of California (in collaboration with the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality), http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_1013SBR.pdf. This report also shows that, when the official poverty measure is used, the overall poverty rate for California is 16.2 and the deep poverty rate is 6.1 (in 2011).


7. This decline in the population of the nonworking poor is not wholly attributable to welfare reforms. Because the reforms occurred during a period of economic expansion, some portion of the decline may be attributed to the increased demand for workers.

8. The mission of GRACE (Gather, Respect, Advocate, Change, Engage), a nonprofit organization sponsored by the Daughters of Charity, is to address the needs of people living in poverty and to make a positive difference in the lives of low-income families and their children.

9. The proposals advanced here do not directly address two key domains, those of housing and incarceration, in which major reform efforts are either being planned or are under way. The full set of reviews will be published at www.inequality.com.


14. For a thorough examination of the evidence, see a recent review by Mathematica Policy Research. This review, which was carried out in conjunction with the National Institutes of Health library and under the auspices of the Department of Health and Human Services (see http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/default.aspx), includes program model reports (http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/models.aspx), implementation reports (http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/implementations.aspx), and an executive summary (http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/HomVEE_Executive_Summary_2011.pdf#exec_summary).


17. The available evidence suggests that more extensive services can have substantial payoff (e.g., Meckstroth, Alicia, Andrew Burwick, Quinn Moore, and Michael Ponza. 2009, “Teaching Self Sufficiency Through Home Visitation and Life Skills Education.” Issue Brief Number 3, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.).

18. This estimate equals the difference between the total number of families in CPM poverty and the total number currently served under the California Home Visiting program or the Early Start Program. It does not take into account that some proportion of these families would not opt to participate in any new services. Moreover, because it does not adjust for families served under other home visiting programs, it is likely an upper-bound estimate of unmet need. But even more conservative estimates reveal substantial need. See California Department of Public Health. 2011. California Affordable Care Act Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program: Supplemental Information Request for the Submission of the Statewide Needs Assessment. Sacramento, CA: Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health Program Center for Family Health. http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/mcah/Documents/MO-HVP-FinalCaliforniaStatewide-HV-NA.pdf.


24. The main interpretive complexity is that randomized trial assessments of Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) have yielded less favorable results. Although HS and EHS initially have positive effects on various cognitive measures, these effects tend to disappear by the end of kindergarten. The rate of fadeout for present-day cohorts appears to be faster than has been observed for children who were in Head Start in the 1960s through 1980s. For this earlier cohort, the effect on test scores persists and long-term impacts on adult outcomes are approximately 80 percent as large as those for small-scale programs, like Perry Preschool and Abecedarian. There is much debate about why HS effects appear to be washing out more quickly now. The “catch-up hypothesis,” which is very plausible, suggests that elementary schools are becoming increasingly successful at remediating deficits among children who enter kindergarten without the benefit of preschool. That is, rather than recent HS participants experiencing fadeout, we may be seeing recent non-participants “catching up” through increasingly intensive remediation in elementary schools. The catch-up hypothesis implies that this more aggressive remediation has only become possible because HS has reduced the number of under-performing students delivered to the schools. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). 2010. Head Start Impact Study. Final Report. Administration for Children and Families. Washington, D.C.: HHS; Love, John M., Ellen Eliaison Kisker, Christine M. Ross, Peter Z. Schochet, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Diane Paulsell, Kimberly Boller, Jill Constantine, Cheri Vogel, Allison Sidle Fulgini, and Christy Brady-Smith. 2002. Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and their Families: The Impacts of Early Head Start. Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Washington, D.C.: HHS; Deming, David. 2009. “Early Childhood Intervention and Life-Cycle Skill Development: Evidence from Head Start.” American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 1(3), 111–134; Gibbs, Clloe, Jens Ludvig, and Douglas L. Miller. 2013. “Head Start Origins and Impacts.” Chapter 2. Legacies of the War on Poverty, edited by Sheldon Danziger and Martha J. Bailey. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

25. There are approximately 332,000 children under age 4 who are in CPM poverty and are not served by existing subsidized child care programs. If we extend to children between ages 5 and 12 (with a corresponding focus on afterschool and summer programs), another 767,000 children are not served by existing programs. These numbers pertain to the total number of unserved children and do not take into account that only some portion of these children would participate in any new programs. For related (but different) calculations, see California Department of Education. 2011. 2011 Status Report on the Implementation of County Centralized Eligibility Lists. http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/cj/documents/cellegrpt11.pdf; California Department of Education. 2011. “Updated Child Development Income Ceilings.” Management Bulletin 11.06. http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/cj/mb1106.asp; San Mateo County Office of Education. 2014. California State Preschool Programs Eligibility. http://www.smcoe.org/learning-and-leadership/preschool-to-grade-3/california-safe-preschool-programs-eligibility.html.


32. This is not to gainsay the equally important point that some job training programs, especially sectoral ones, are also very promising.


34. For relevant evidence, see Tessler, Betsy. 2012. WorkAdvance: Testing a New Approach to Increase Employment Advancement for Low-Skilled Adults, New York: MDRC.


43. The recommendations advanced here do not encompass the full constellation of programs for which strong evidence of effectiveness can be found. For an excellent review of many programs not covered here, see Haskins, Ron, “Social Programs that Work,” New York Times, December 31, 2014 (http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/01/opinion/social-programs-that-work.html?_r=0). See also Haskins, Ron, Greg Margolis, Show Me the Evidence, 2014, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press. There are also any number of key questions about poverty programming that remain unresolved. The evidence is not clear, for example, on whether early and late childhood programs are best delivered by coordinating service delivery at the state or local level. Under a centralized approach, the coordination problem is solved at the state level, with representatives of state service agencies (e.g., the California Department of Social Services) endeavoring to build programs that integrate well with one another. This is of course an ongoing and imperfectly realized process. The obvious alternative is to approach the coordination problem at the local level. The best-known initiative of this sort, Promise Neighborhoods, may be understood as a particular rendition of the equal opportunity plan, predicated on the view that, in any given community, the constellation of service providers is quite variable and that community-specific plans for integrating them are likely to be most successful.