

# Aspiration, assets can lead youth down path to college

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(Phys.org)—Aspiring to attend college is not enough for children who want to reach their goals.

The chances of finishing high school and college are significantly higher for children for whom this [aspiration](#) is accessible and relevant in their daily lives, according to a new University of Michigan study.

U-M researcher Daphna Oyserman focused on how low [economic resources](#) might impact children's [academic outcomes](#) by influencing [motivation](#). That is, how children imagine their future. It might involve strategies such as studying or asking questions in class. Or, they might interpret difficulties along the way as meaning that succeeding in school is an important goal rather than an impossible one.

Saving money for college, even small sums, might solidify the idea that the present is connected to the future—that what one does now matters for the future, she said.

"Having assets may make imagining a future easier and at the same time, imagining a future path may make savings more likely for children," said Oyserman, the Edwin J. Thomas Collegiate Professor of [Social Work](#), as well as a [psychology professor](#) and researcher at the Institute for Social Research.

Lack of certainty, when not accompanied by a sense that one has the skills and abilities to succeed in attaining one's future goals, reduces the reality of future (vs. current) possibilities, she said.

"It makes strategies for attaining future goals less appealing and increases the chances that difficulty will be interpreted as meaning that effort is hopeless," Oyserman said.

Policies that make it easier for children to save toward college at an early age are likely to improve their academic outcomes if the savings is considered as a current action taken toward a future, college-bound identity.

"This should improve chances of children spending time on [homework](#) as well as their engagement in classroom activities," she said.

Saving now for a later is not easy, but implies that aspiring to attend college is an important goal.

"This will motivate children to persevere on difficult school tasks," Oyserman said.

The findings appear in the current issue of *Economics of Education Review*.

**More information:** [sww.umich.edu/about/profiles/profile-daphna.html](https://sww.umich.edu/about/profiles/profile-daphna.html)

Provided by University of Michigan

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