

Want higher graduation rates? New study shows public spending on families is key

November 11 2023, by Shelly DeJong



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A new study, conducted in collaboration between researchers at Michigan State University and Central Michigan University, found that public spending on social safety net programs and on education spending

each independently impact high school graduation rates, which are a key predictor of health and well-being later in life.

The study, [published](#) in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, tested whether public financing for education and social safety net programs that aim to help improve the lives of low-income people affected high school graduation rates over a seven-year period. The study used data on high school graduation rates from all U.S. public elementary and [secondary schools](#), public spending on safety net programs and education in each state, and characteristics of schools and counties.

The researchers found that high school graduation rates were significantly affected by both social safety net program spending and public education. In addition, these positive impacts are larger for children belonging to historically underserved student groups.

The study's findings have straightforward implications for improving graduation rates in public schools.

"Assuming the other form of spending remains at average levels, we found that a one percentage point increase in high school graduation rates is associated with an additional investment of \$437 per child in social safety net spending or \$720 in educational spending," said Ignacio Acevedo-Polakovich, co-author of the study and associate professor in MSU's Department of Psychology. "Our findings underscore the importance of adequately financing both high-quality public [education](#) systems and social safety net programs."

High school graduation is a key predictor of public health and well-being. Individuals who dropped out of high school have an annual income that is on average \$10,000 less than high school graduates and over \$36,000 less than those with a bachelor's degree. High [school](#) graduates have a reduced risk of health conditions later in life and an

increased life expectancy.

More information: Sharon Kukla-Acevedo et al, Beyond Education Dollars: Does Social Safety Net Spending Affect High School Graduation Rates?, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.08.050](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.08.050)

Provided by Michigan State University

Citation: Want higher graduation rates? New study shows public spending on families is key (2023, November 11) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-11-higher-families-key.html>

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