

New IFS Report: Three Steps That Nearly Guarantee Young Adults Avoid Poverty

New research from the Institute for Family Studies shows how to put the Success Sequence into classrooms. More than 72% of parents want their states to.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA, UNITED STATES, April 14, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Institute for Family Studies (IFS) today released a new report, [Advancing the Path to Success: How States Can Teach the Success Sequence to Youth](#), which looks at one of the most consequential but under-utilized ideas in youth education: the Success Sequence.



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Alan J. Hawkins

The Success Sequence is simple: finish at least high school, get a full-time job, then marry before having children. When young people follow these three steps and in that order, 97% are not in poverty by their mid-30s, and 86%

reach at least the middle class. When they miss a step or get the order wrong, more than half end up poor.

The data is especially striking across demographic and economic lines. Consider that only 4% of Black Millennials and 3% of Hispanic Millennials who follow the sequence are poor and just 6% of those who grew up in lower-income households but followed the sequence end up in poverty. The sequence works for almost everyone.

KEY FINDINGS

97% of young adults who follow the Success Sequence are not in poverty by their mid-30s.

10x greater odds of poverty by midlife for those who skip or reorder the steps.

50% reduction in emotional distress for adults who complete the full sequence.

72%+ of American parents regardless of political part support teaching the sequence in schools.

31% of lower-income Millennials are on track with the sequence, vs. 65% of upper-income peers.

WHAT STATES CAN DO

Authored by Alan J. Hawkins, PhD (Non-Resident Fellow, IFS) and Connie Huber, EdD (Senior Curriculum Fellow, IFS), the report advances concrete, actionable roadmap for states. Key recommendations include:

- Require teaching the Success Sequence in public schools through state standards and real benchmarks.
- Integrate drop-in modules into existing courses health, financial literacy, social studies using evidence-based curricula already available at little or no cost.
- Invest in social media campaigns targeting teens and young adults, where emerging evidence shows meaningful attitude and behavior change is achievable.
- Create first-year experience initiatives at community colleges and universities for 18–25-year-olds during their most important decision-making years.
- Create a formal state commission to coordinate and sustain these efforts over time. These can be lean but they need to be funded.

The report uses real-world models from Utah, Ohio, and Arkansas, states that have already begun legislating and implementing Success Sequence instruction, to prove this is not theoretical. Utah's legislature passed HB281 in 2025, mandating Success Sequence instruction in Health and Financial Literacy courses statewide.

FROM THE AUTHORS

“Too many young Americans are navigating one of the most consequential stretches of their lives without a roadmap. The data is unambiguous. The Success Sequence is not a moral sermon it’s a well-worn path to self-sufficiency, emotional health, and stable families. States have the tools to teach it. The question is whether they will.”— Alan J. Hawkins, PhD, Non-Resident Fellow, Institute for Family Studies

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alan J. Hawkins, PhD, is a Non-Resident Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies and Professor Emeritus at Brigham Young University. He is a leading national researcher on marriage education, relationship literacy, and family policy.

Connie Huber, EdD, is a Senior Curriculum Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies and co-developer of *The Secret: Secrets, Sequences, and Successes* — a Success Sequence curriculum piloted in Arkansas and now in use in Utah schools.

ABOUT IFS

The Institute for Family Studies is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our mission is to strengthen marriage and family life through research and public education. IFS produces rigorous,

plainspoken research read by policymakers, parents, journalists, and scholars across the ideological spectrum. Visit: ifstudies.org

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