

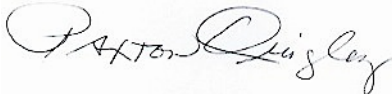
January 15, 2015

Dear interested colleagues,

During his life, the late Hymen Milgrom donated substantially towards improving urban education, most significantly through the Urban Teacher Education Program at the University of Chicago, a program that has since then progressed to a large scale with federal funding. The Milgrom family has now decided to honor our father by using his bequest to the University of Chicago to support research on education in Chicago and other large urban centers. More specifically, the aim of this project is to conduct research that will help schools become more effective in fostering the skills, dispositions, and experiences that are essential for success in the modern labor market.

To this end, the Milgrom family formed the Hymen Milgrom Supporting Organization (HMSO) that is now soliciting proposals for research. This document describes the need for the research that the HMSO will fund in 2015, the research topics that will be eligible for funding, who may apply for funding, the likely duration and level of support for funded projects, the process by which proposals will be reviewed, and the deadlines for submitting proposals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paxton Quigley".

Paxton Quigley, daughter of Hymen Milgrom

## Successful Pathways from School to Work

A Request for Proposals

January 15, 2015

### **Background**

After World War II many American workers enjoyed unprecedented access to the American dream through employment in comparatively high-paid jobs in U.S. cities. Millions held industrial jobs in big cities like Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Buffalo. The hours were long and the work hard, but the pay was often good enough to buy a modest home and car and, for an increasing number of families, to pay the next generation's tuition at a local public college. These cities were racially segregated but economically quite strong and some had respectable public school systems.

In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, William Julius Wilson described the massive decline in industrial jobs and, with it, dramatic increases in unemployment, loss of income, disruption of families, and a dramatic decline of schools in large US cities during the 1970s and 1980s. Ironically, Wilson found that the increasingly equal opportunity emanating from the civil rights era, while benefiting many, had a perverse and unexpected effect on others living in the nation's

largest cities. Just as industrial jobs began to disappear for uneducated workers, more highly-educated minority parents, taking advantage of new opportunities for upward mobility and desegregated housing markets, moved from the central city. Wilson labeled those left behind as “the truly disadvantaged.” Several factors undermined the educational opportunities of their children: loss of income, reducing the investments parents could make in their children; delays in family formation, leading to dramatic increases in the numbers of children growing up in single-parent families; social isolation of poor, minority children growing up in sections of cities that were hyper-segregated, not only by race but also by social class; and decline in school quality. Neal (2006) provides evidence that loss of income and changes in family formation help account for racial inequality in educational outcomes. Social isolation deprived poor children and their families of contact with others who had benefited from education, creating a shortage of badly needed role models and sources of information about schools, jobs, and routes to upward mobility (Harding, 2010). Social isolation separated the poorest minority children from contact with people who used academic English—the language of instruction in schools—likely making it more difficult for such children to benefit from instruction at school.

Amplifying the difficulties of growing up poor in a single-parent family, such children were concentrated in resource-deprived sections of cities where many of their neighbors were also members of poor, single-parent families. Evidence suggests that this concentration of disadvantage undermined the collective efficacy of many such communities to monitor and supervise children (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Lack of opportunity, poor schooling, inadequate policing, and low collective efficacy in turn created a climate that too often supported the escalation of gang activity, drug abuse, and violent crime. These negative forces generated further incentives to move out, but of course, only those with means could do so, further intensifying the social isolation and concentration of disadvantage among those who remained.

As a result of these and other powerful social forces, many young people growing up in segregated, low-income sections of the nation’s largest cities experience extraordinarily high unemployment rates and poor prospects for upward mobility. We need to know much more than we do about how to shape social policies to address this crisis. Reflecting the strong interests of Hymen Milgrom, the focus of our work will be on better understanding the potential contribution of education in meeting this challenge.

According to widely-shared American ideals, the school should be a place where children of all backgrounds can gain the skills, dispositions, and information they need to connect to the modern economy. However, schools serving children in disadvantaged urban communities continue to fall massively short of this ideal. Moreover, they have proven notoriously difficult to improve. Indeed, Payne (2008) describes the chronic failure of top-down urban school reform efforts such as increasing accountability and changing school governance in improving achievement for the nation’s urban youth. In Chicago, for example, we have evidence that test scores and high school graduation rates have increased in recent years as a result of district improvement efforts, but the fraction of students whose skills ill-prepare them for productive employment remains shockingly large. Coca, Nagaoka, and Roderick (2011) estimate that about 35% of all Chicago ninth graders will drop out of school before gaining a high school degree; of those who graduate, another 30% have extremely low grade point averages, indicating not simply poor academic skills, but equally or more important, records of poor attendance and difficulty in completing work on time. Because success in the workplace requires reliable, disciplined effort,

these findings do not bode well for the employment success of a great many of the children attending the Chicago Public Schools.

Such reasoning compels us to recognize that we are face a crisis, yet we have little solid data that would enable us to connect children's schooling experiences with their prospects as young adults in the labor market or in society. Crucially for the initiative we describe here, the nation's researchers and policy makers have evaluated school improvement efforts primarily in terms of impacts on test scores, high school graduation rates, or, in rare instances, success in enrolling students in college. We know very little about the impact of school improvement efforts on success in the modern labor market and success in other broad aspects of adult functioning such as mental well being, pro-social behavior, and effective parenting. We have some exciting experimental evidence that intensive pre-school programs lead to elevated adult earnings and reduced incarceration (Carneiro and Heckman, 2003), but we know little about the comparative effectiveness of schools in leveraging the success of early interventions in order to promote adult success. We have encouraging evidence that certain innovative schools produce dramatic gains in test scores (see review by Dobie and Fryer 2011), and while test scores predict economic productivity, other skills and dispositions learned in school are at least as important as test scores in predicting sustained success in later schooling and in the labor market (Bowles, Gintis, and Osborne, 2001). We know that teachers vary quite dramatically in their effectiveness, and that the best teachers help children gain academic skills and earn more money as adults (Chetty, et al., 2011) but we know too little about how to improve the quality of teaching so that many more students can benefit, and too little about how effective teaching affects nonacademic skills that count greatly in the labor market.

## **Research Perspective and Topics**

Current interest in educational reform comes at a time when low-skill, high-wage manufacturing jobs continue to disappear while the economy produces an array of new jobs, some of which pay well and require high levels of skill (Levy and Murnane, 2004; Goldin and Katz, 2009). The popular slogan "college for all" is a response to this development. It is important for all children to be prepared for college and to have college as an option, but it is also important that students be prepared for a broader menu of successful pathways to careers, including on-job-training after high school and a variety of other post-secondary vocational training options.

The gap between the demands of the labor market and the skills, dispositions, and information that a large fraction of urban children are developing is vast and deeply disturbing, motivating this project. The research we envision will ask about a) how schools, starting in pre-K, can become more effective in fostering the skills that are most essential for labor market success; b) how schools can be more effective in motivating persistent, reliable effort to attend school, complete work on time, progress from grade to grade, accumulate credits, and graduate; and c) how schools can become more helpful in making available information and experiences that enable youth to envision and successfully carry out post-secondary plans of action that lead to stable, productive employment.

Among the relevant challenges facing us are the precise definition and measurement of the requisite skills at relevant ages; a critical evaluation of evidence regarding instructional efforts that foster those skills; analysis of the mission and organizational functioning of schools; ways of increasing the capacity of schools to coordinate efforts with parents, social service agencies, and employers; and more. This work requires close collaboration between researchers from several disciplines who study youth development and schooling from early childhood to early adulthood and who are capable of producing and synthesizing evidence from multiple methodological perspectives. We also envision an active role for practitioners in shaping questions, making sense of research findings, considering their implications for policy and practice, and framing the overall research agenda.

### **Request for Proposals**

The HMSO seeks to support a wide range of relevant, innovative, studies, including a mix of studies of early schooling (beginning in pre-Kindergarten and extending through the elementary years) and studies of how secondary schools can best prepare heterogeneous students for successful pathways into the modern labor market. Examples of topics include: how to improve attendance at every level of schooling, how instruction at each level fosters a wide range of skills and dispositions needed in the labor market, and how interventions to improve parental and student health affect student engagement. Studies of transitions into secondary school and beyond might include how to measure preparedness for success at work, how to increase information and experiences that can guide career choices, how to mobilize support and engagement of local employers, and how schools can reduce barriers to productive employment such as illegal activity, substance use, risky sexual behavior, and early pregnancy. We are keenly interested in the development of data systems that track students through schooling and into all postsecondary destinations, including not only college attendance but also military service, jobs, the criminal justice system, and marriage. And the HMSO seeks to evaluate interventions that show great potential to promote successful pathways to the labor market.

For the 2015 competition, the HMSO invites proposals from **graduate students only**, for a range of study types. We are especially interested in innovations occurring in preschool and public elementary and secondary school settings that can promote successful pathways from public schools to the labor market. Two kinds of intervention are of particular interest: those occurring early (during pre-elementary and elementary years) that show potential to assist children who otherwise would be at high risk of entering high school with poor academic and non-academic skills; and those that occur later (during the secondary school years) that show great potential to enable young people with comparatively low skills to gain the skills, dispositions, and information needed for successful transitions into the labor market.

### **Who May Apply**

Research funds will be dedicated exclusively for pre-doctoral students at the University of Chicago, working under close supervision of faculty mentors. We will fund two-year projects. The estimated level of support is \$25,000 per year.

**Field-Initiated Pre-doctoral Projects.** Doctoral students at the University of Chicago may submit LOI for projects lasting a maximum of two-years with a funding limit of \$25,000 per year. Students who do not already have stipends may include living expenses in their project budgets. Research funds will be disbursed in two installments: a) initially; and b) after 12 months, conditional on review of a progress report due 9 months after the start of the study. Living expenses will be disbursed quarterly, consistent with University policy for graduate student stipends. Students should plan to complete not only the data collection, but also the analysis and “writing up” of their results within this two-year time frame. The HMSO expects students to have an academic article either published or submitted to a scholarly journal by the end of this period. The "time schedule" section of the LOI should state clearly the plan for accomplishing this. Each LOI must be accompanied by a CV and a letter of support from a faculty mentor.

**University Overhead.** No funds will be available for overhead expenses.

**Peer Review.** All projects, whether initiated by students, faculty, or the HMSO, will be subject to scientific review. A peer-review panel composed of distinguished scholars with relevant expertise will be selected by the Chair of the Committee on Education at the University of Chicago to review the proposals. The peer review group will determine whether each proposal is scientifically acceptable and will rank the quality of the acceptable proposals and provide comments on the appropriateness of their budgets. Based on these rankings, the HMSO may negotiate the budget of specific projects, but it must select projects for funding according to the rank order provided by the peer review panel.

**Learning Network.** The HMSO will convene conferences and workshops periodically that will engage scholars and practitioners in synthesizing findings from the funded studies, characterizing their implications for action, and setting new agendas for research. The HMSO will periodically evaluate the progress of the overall project and suggest modifications for future funding. The HMSO will also encourage partnerships with outside agencies and persons in order to raise additional funding that will advance the aims of the overall project. Those engaged in funded projects must make a commitment to attend periodic research seminars that will enable participating researchers to learn from each other’s work.

### **Process of Application and Review**

We now seek (LOI) that cannot exceed 700 words in length. The LOI must include the following headings and in the following order:

1. Specific Research Question(s)
2. Rationale and Significance
3. Data
4. Personnel
5. Time Schedule
6. Approximate Total Budget

The HMSO will invite formal proposals from those LOI that show a high promise in advancing the aims of the overall research program. Formal proposals, not to exceed 12 single spaced pages (or 6,600 words) in length, will clearly specify central research questions, elaborate

the background and significance of the proposed work, describe relevant preliminary work, and propose appropriate research design and methods, a plan for dissemination, a detailed budget, and a budget justification.

**Where to Send LOI.** All LOI, letters of support, and CVs must be submitted by April 30 via email to: [successfulpathways@uchicago.edu](mailto:successfulpathways@uchicago.edu). Submissions should be in both Word and PDF formats.

**Contact.** Please direct queries about the application process to Lisa Rosen, Research Program Director, via email ([rosen@uchicago.edu](mailto:rosen@uchicago.edu)) or phone (773-834-7561).

### **Time Line.**

**April 30, 2015:** Deadline for submission of LOI.

**May 29, 2015:** Requests for a full proposal for most promising LOI

**July 31, 2015:** Deadline for full proposals

**October 1, 2015:** Announcement of Grant Awards

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