Poverty and related disadvantages in infancy and early childhood can affect children’s cognitive development and readiness to learn, studies show, producing disparities in skills and academic achievement. These disparities may grow as children age.

Sound investments that reduce adversity in early childhood can strengthen the foundations of physical and mental health, helping children do better in school and grow up to become healthier and more productive adults.

WIC supports sound nutrition during critical periods of cognitive development to mitigate the harmful effects of poverty. New research shows that children whose mothers participated in WIC while pregnant scored higher on assessments of mental development at age 2 than similar children whose mothers didn’t participate.

The benefits of WIC participation lasted into the school years, as children whose mothers participated in WIC while pregnant performed better on reading assessments and were less likely to repeat a grade.