The Institute of Human Development and Social Change (IHDSC) is the largest interdisciplinary institute on New York University (NYU)’s Washington Square campus. IHDSC’s mission is to stimulate research on children, youth, and families in the context of a rapidly changing social world. IHDSC aims to break new intellectual ground through its support for rigorous, interdisciplinary research and training across social, behavioral, educational, policy, and health sciences. Institute priorities include research on basic change processes in human development, how these processes are affected by educational, social, economic, historical, political, and cultural contexts, and how these processes may be altered by intentional change strategies in these realms. A central goal is to bridge the longstanding disconnect between research in human development across the lifespan and policies and practices that affect children, youth, adults, and families. In the spirit of the common enterprise university, IHDSC brings together faculty and students from the Steinhardt School of Education, Culture, and Human Development, the Faculty of Arts and Science, and the Wagner School of Public Service in new forms of knowledge creation (research), knowledge transmission (education), and knowledge utilization (policy and practice).

Since its inception in 2007, the Institute has brought together more than 50 faculty members to conduct multidisciplinary research on a variety of topics regarding human development in changing social contexts. It does so by providing: 1) seed support for faculty to launch new programs of inquiry; 2) an infrastructure for grants development and management; and 3) an intellectual community for substantive and methodological cross-fertilization across research efforts in key thematic areas. With about a dozen new grants awarded to IHDSC faculty affiliates each year, IHDSC currently manages more than 40 grants with a portfolio of over $40 million. IHDSC faculty affiliates have successfully received funding from both public and private sources, including grants from the National Institutes of Health, the Institute of Education Sciences, the Administration for Children and Families, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, and the William T. Grant Foundation.

The Institute actively promotes interdisciplinary undergraduate, pre-doctoral, and post-doctoral training. Most notably, IHDSC houses the prestigious Institute for Education Sciences Predoctoral Interdisciplinary Research Training (IES-PIRT) program, which has been a central contributor to interdisciplinary research training in education sciences at NYU. The IES-PIRT program has been instrumental in training the next generation of education scholars to conduct work that is squarely focused on school improvement and student learning through research that is theoretically deep, empirically rigorous, and highly relevant to practice and policy. Moreover, the IES-PIRT program has had radiating effects on student recruitment and productivity within participating schools, and it has provided opportunities for faculty collaboration and intellectual community-building across the university.

The challenges faced by low-income children, families, and communities are substantial and complex. Resolving these challenges requires insights from scholarship that is truly interdisciplinary, integrating across the fields of education, psychology, sociology, economics, policy, statistics, neuroscience, social work, public health, and medicine. Bringing together faculty and students in a vibrant intellectual community committed to research, education, practice, and policy, IHDSC facilitates the development of the innovative perspectives and methodological breakthroughs that will be necessary to effectively address the needs of at risk children and families in the United States and around the world.