

Inequalities at the school starting gate: gaps, trends, and strategies to address them

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A 3-goals study

- 1. Gaps by socioeconomic status (SES) at kindergarten entry in 2010**
 - In cognitive and noncognitive skills (CS, NCS)
- 2. Comparison with gaps by SES in 1998**
 - Did they grow? If so, by how much? And where?
 - How much of the SES gaps is accounted for by other determinants of performance (family composition, education practices at home)?
 - Do determinants' influence on performance change over time?
- 3. Explore strategies in school districts employing comprehensive educational approaches:**
 - Strong early academic and life foundations
 - Sustain and build on early gains throughout the K-12 school years

Summary of analysis (1)

Quantitative analysis:

- 2 nationally representative studies (NCES):
 - **ECLS-K 1998-1999 and 2010-2011**
- Socioeconomic status (**SES**):
 - Five groups (low, low-middle, middle, high-middle, high SES)
- **Outcomes** (fall-kindergarten, standardized by year):
 - Math, reading, approaches to learning, self-control
- **Comparison of performance of high and low SES children**
 - Unadjusted (i.e., real, observed, differences)
 - Adjusted (family characteristics, educational practices, expectations)

Summary of analysis (2)

Qualitative analysis:

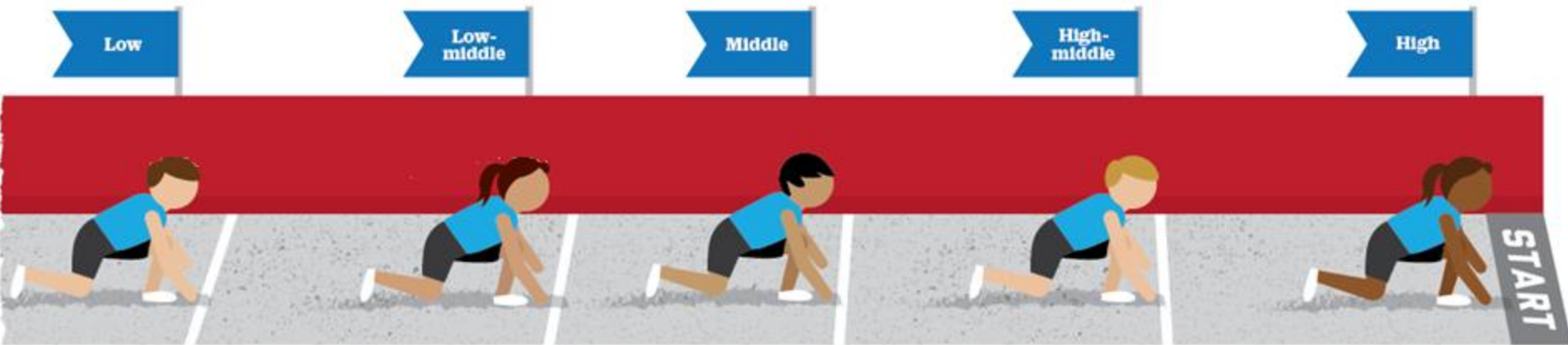
- 12 case studies (<http://www.boldapproach.org/case-studies/>)



- Explore district-level investments in ECE, K-12, and a range of wraparound supports

Findings: gaps by SES

Differences on the first day of kindergarten 2010



Cognitive skills

Reading (1.17)

Math (1.25)

Noncognitive skills (reported by teachers)

Self-control (0.4)

Approaches to learning (0.5)

Noncognitive skills (reported by parents)

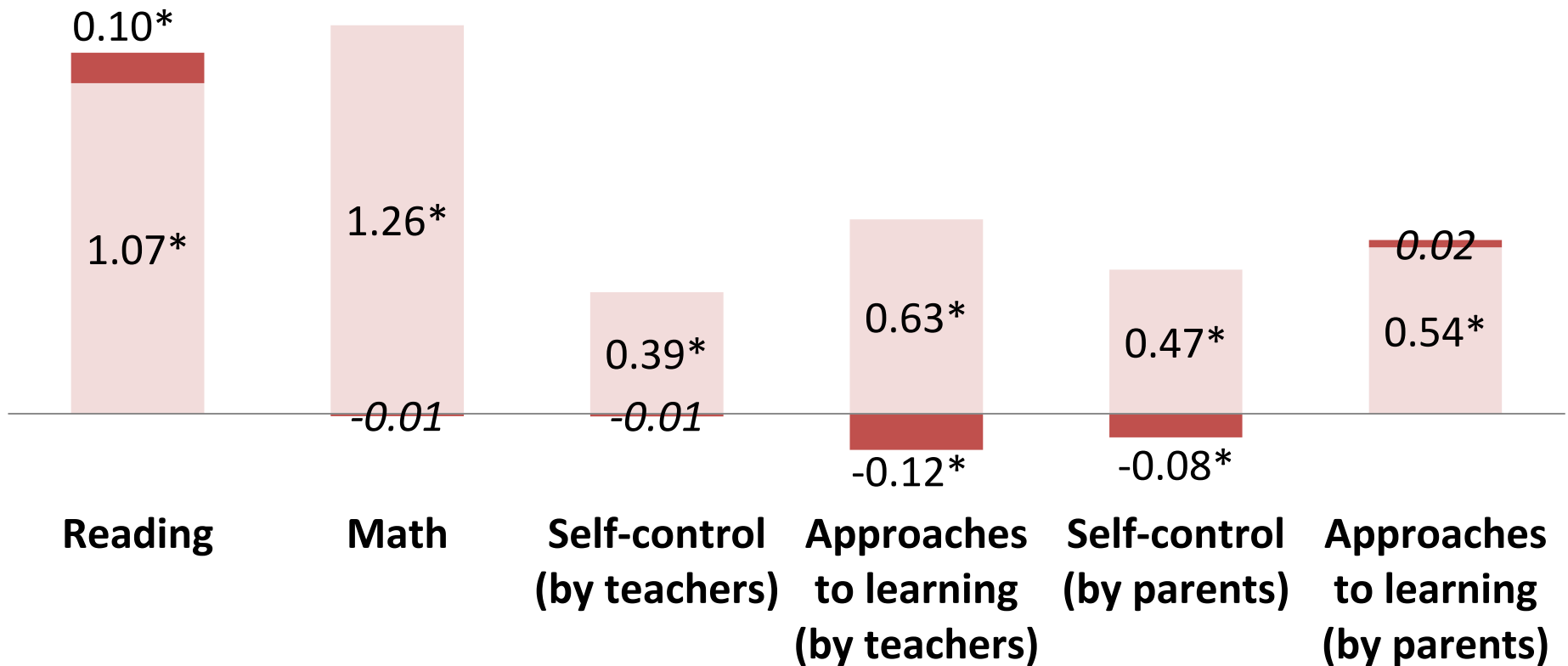
Self-control (0.4)

Approaches to learning (0.6)

Change in skills gaps by SES, 1998-2010

■ Change in gap between 1998 and 2010

■ Gap between high-SES (fifth) and low-SES (first) quintiles in 1998



Source: EPI analysis of ECLS-K, Kindergarten Class of 1998–1999 and 2010–2011 (National Center for Education Statistics)

The roles of other determinants of performance

- 1. Part of the SES gaps is accounted for by other factors that correlate with SES (ex.: pre-K)**
 - What are the gaps by SES net of them?
- 2. Factors are important variables:**
 - Help to identify groups in highest need
 - Point to policy interventions that could improve student performance

Reduction in gaps by SES coefficient in 1998 and 2010 after controls

		Percentage reduction
Reading	1998	-45.5%
	2010	-42.9%
Approaches to learning (by teachers)	1998	-28.3%
	2010	-20.3%
Approaches to learning (by parents)	1998	-73.5%
	2010	-56.0%

- Controls account for ~half of the gaps in CS (large variation for NCS)
- Controls accounted for a larger share of the gaps in 1998

Associations between performance and early educational practices

- **Center-based preschool:**
 - Positively associated with reading and math skills
 - Relationship does not change significantly over time
 - Negatively associated with self-control reported by teachers
 - Correlation is less negative in 2010
- **Activities at home:**
 - Reading/literacy activities: positively associated with ~all skills
 - Relationship weakened for NCS as assessed by parents
 - Other activities: negative for CS, positive for NCS
 - Relationship intensified over time for parents' assessed NCS
- **Expectations about educational attainment:**
 - Positive and increased over time

How school districts tackle inequities and support children's development

- **Broad and targeted investments in children and families from birth to kindergarten entry**
- **Sustained investments in the K-12 years, both in and out of schools, in a whole-child manner**
 - Enrichment in the classroom for all
 - Aligned out-of-school and summer activities
 - Physical and mental health care and wellness supports
 - Elementary-middle-high school transition, other SEL supports
- **Evidence of gains across a range of measures, academic and other**
 - From improved kindergarten readiness to AP-course taking, graduation
 - Boosts largest for disadvantaged students, so achievement gaps narrow

Summary: good and bad news



- ✓ Despite steadily increasing income inequality, compounded by the worst economic crisis in many decades, most gaps have not grown
- ✓ A growing number of communities are tackling these challenges through comprehensive strategies to support children's needs and boost their strengths
- Despite knowledge accumulated by researchers and parents on child development, expansion of pre-K, awareness of the value of education, gaps have not generally decreased
- And while momentum to enact "*Broader, Bolder Approaches*" to Education is growing, they are expanding slowly, still reaching too few students

Policy implications

- Supports need to start early:
 - Child care, home visiting and parent engagement programs, preschool
- Supports need to continue throughout school:
 - Increased and more equitable funding, economic and racial integration, after-school, and summer time
- But education policy alone isn't enough, as factors driving gaps are diverse/complex:
 - Low social class children are behind in CS and NCS
 - More likely to not speak English, not live with 2-parents, immigrants, not have had preschool, fewer early literacy practices at home

Policy implications

- These challenges can be alleviated by economic and social policies
 - Expand successful district strategies, enact state policies that support them
 - Increase wage and employment opportunities
 - Improve the EITC and child tax credit
 - Reform correction policies
 - Reform immigration policies
 - Reduce concentrated and multigenerational poverty

Thank you!

Report will be available at: www.epi.org

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