March 22, 2019

Disparities in Educational Opportunity

Implications for the U.S. Economy and Policy

Erica Greenberg
What is Educational Opportunity?

- **Access to coordinated, excellent instruction** that provides the skills all students will need to thrive in a rapidly changing economy and society (Duncan and Murnane 2014)

- Disparities by: race, ethnicity, nativity, socioeconomic status, gender, geography, etc.

- Challenges of observation: opportunity vs. outcomes
History of Disparities in Educational Outcomes

![Graph showing history of disparities in educational outcomes]

**Growth** in the Income-Based Test Score Gap

**Decline** in the Black-White Test Score Gap

When do Disparities in Educational Outcomes Arise?

- By 9 months – and disparities widen through 2 years (Halle et al. 2009)
- Preservation through school and growth into postsecondary education (Baker, Klasik, and Reardon 2018; Reardon 2013)
What is Happening During Children’s Early Years?

- Substantial disparities in educational opportunity
  - Among children 3-5, 71% of poor children versus 84% of non-poor children are read to regularly at home (NHES 2016)
  - Among children 0-5, 46% of poor children versus 63% of non-poor children experience any regular early care and education (NHES 2016)
  - Quality varies across settings (Bassok, Fitzpatrick, Greenberg, and Loeb 2016)
  - Yet, gaps in early childhood experiences and in early school outcomes are narrowing (Bassok et al. 2016, Reardon and Portilla 2016)
What, then, Can Schools and Other Institutions Do?

- Can schools
  - Reverse early disparities?
  - Hold inequality at bay?
  - Perpetuate broader inequities?
- Disparities persist because of forces well beyond education.
Longer-Term Implications for the U.S. Economy

- Lost human capital
- Economic inequality
- Global competitiveness
Policy Implications

- Investments in evidence-based initiatives
- Young children
- Schools, colleges, and universities
- Health, housing, income supports
- Policy innovation paired with evaluation
How Will We Know if Policies Are Working?

The long-term measure of success will be the educational attainments and earnings of adults who grew up in low-income families and the restoration of intergenerational mobility.

- Duncan and Murnane (2014), *Restoring Opportunity*
Toward US 2050

The project’s goal is to foster a clearer vision of America’s future and spur a sense of urgency to address pressing policy concerns, thereby laying the groundwork for better outcomes.