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TOO MANY CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND
A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON SES ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

In a new book from Russell Sage Foundation, Bruce Bradbury, Miles Corak, Liz Washbrook, and I use cohort data to study achievement of children in low, medium, & high socioeconomic status (SES) families in 4 peer countries:

United States

United Kingdom

Canada

Australia
Finding #1 Achievement gaps are largest in the US
And at age 11

Panel C

Std dev difference

0.0 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1.0 1.2

US reading 0.45
US math 0.39
UK reading 0.34
AU reading 0.28
AU math 0.23
CN math 0.20
Finding #2: Gaps at school entry account for the majority of the gaps in reading at age 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>AU</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 11 top-bottom gap</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.68</td>
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<td>Of which:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Due to initial differences</td>
<td>0.72 (70%)</td>
<td>0.40 (57%)</td>
<td>0.45 (66%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Due to later divergence</td>
<td>0.31 (30%)</td>
<td>0.29 (43%)</td>
<td>0.23 (34%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>9650</td>
<td>10,717</td>
<td>3333</td>
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</tbody>
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Finding #3: The large SES achievement gaps in the US are not inevitable – we can and should do more to tackle them.

Three key directions for policy:

1) support early learning through evidence based parenting programs & universal high quality preschool for 3 & 4 year olds

2) raise family incomes for poor/near-poor through minimum wages, EITC & CTC, food and nutrition programs, paid family and medical leave

3) improve quality of teaching and learning in schools through more effective teachers, rigorous curriculum, higher expectations/support for low-achieving students
Inequality at age 11 – which would we choose?