

Understanding Trends in the Black-White Achievement Gaps during the First Years of School

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The research described in this paper has two goals. The first is to examine the extent to which trends in black-white achievement gaps during the first years of school reported by Fryer and Levitt are sensitive to model specification. The second goal is to examine whether the patterns that Fryer and Levitt documented in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) data set are also present in a smaller but richer longitudinal data set collected with the support of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). The authors of this paper examine trends in the black-white gap in mathematics and English Language Arts skills from the beginning of kindergarten to the end of third grade. They also examine the impact of a measure of parenting behavior when children were very young and three types of school quality indicators on students' academic achievement. One finding is that trends in black-white achievement gaps are quite different in the NICHD data set than in the ECLS-K data set. A second is that the measure of early parenting behavior is a strong predictor of subsequent mathematics and English Language Arts skills. A third is that the racial-ethnic composition of the student body and amount of time spent on mathematics instruction influence children's mathematics skills.