

## K-8 Programs to Reduce Achievement Gaps: What Works Best?

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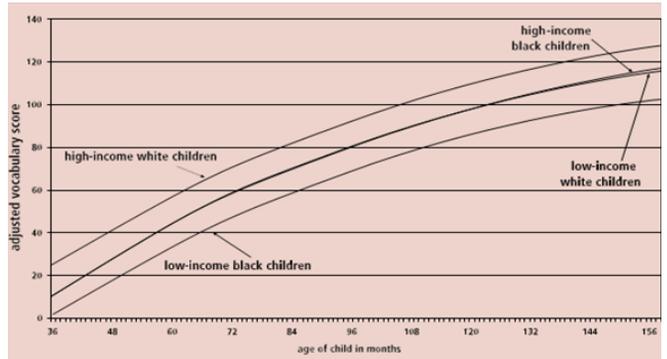
*Professor Farkas critically evaluates recent research on the cost effectiveness of programs that aim to reduce K-8 achievement gaps for low income and ethnic minority students. These initiatives include preschool and kindergarten programs, as well as instructional innovations, social and emotional learning programs, and summer instructional programs. Other promising programs include supplemental educational services, particularly tutoring, and whole school reforms, including charters schools. Professor Farkas demonstrates which programs and policies are most effective for California and the US.*

In both reading and math scores, children in the top quintile of socioeconomic status (SES) entering kindergarten outperform the bottom quintile of students in these areas by an entire standard deviation of the distribution. Differences between children at the top and bottom portions of the socioeconomic scale are also present when considering academic work habits and anti-social behavior. In other words, children from the lowest socioeconomic strata fall behind those at the top, in the academic realm, before they even enter school. These gaps either remain unchanged or increase as students move through their schooling careers. Many programs and policies have attempted to bridge these gaps. I critically evaluate these efforts, and point to the most promising ones.

### Key Findings:

- ◆ Narrowing achievement gaps early in children's lives is the key to success. We have curricula capable of doing so, but they are not widely used. The largest program, Head Start, doesn't use them, and must be improved or replaced.
- ◆ Many programs, policies and instructional innovations, demonstrate little individual influence on reducing K-8 achievement gaps and may not provide a solution to this issue.
- ◆ Intensive one-on-one structured tutoring during the school day, every day for a total of perhaps 150 hours per school year, could play a significant role in narrowing achievement gaps. Continuous intervention, for those who need it, at all grade levels, might also minimize the fade out problem.

### Vocabulary Scores of High- and Low-Income Black and White Children (Age 3-13)



### Implications for Policy

There are many different programs and policies that aim to reduce K-8 achievement gaps for low income and ethnic minority students. On their own, many of those efforts are not successful. Early intervention to narrow achievement gaps at school entry is essential. Similarly, intensive one-on-one structured tutoring during the school day and after school can help close these gaps. Whole school reform with programs like Success for All can be helpful, but effects are too small to be the entire solution. In addition, programs such as this are expensive. On average, charters have shown little difference with public schools. But a subset of "no excuses" schools, such as Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), seem to be the most promising of the options. An effort to implement the attributes of KIPP schools as widely as possible seems worthwhile. The question then becomes: are these programs scalable and are they sustainable?