

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY:
ARE DESTINIES DIVERGING?

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THREE QUESTIONS

1. Are destinies diverging in the US?
2. Are patterns similar across countries?
3. What can be done to reduce educational inequalities and improve social/economic mobility?

1. ARE DESTINIES DIVERGING IN THE US?

Educational inequalities are one of the most important drivers of social and economic inequalities

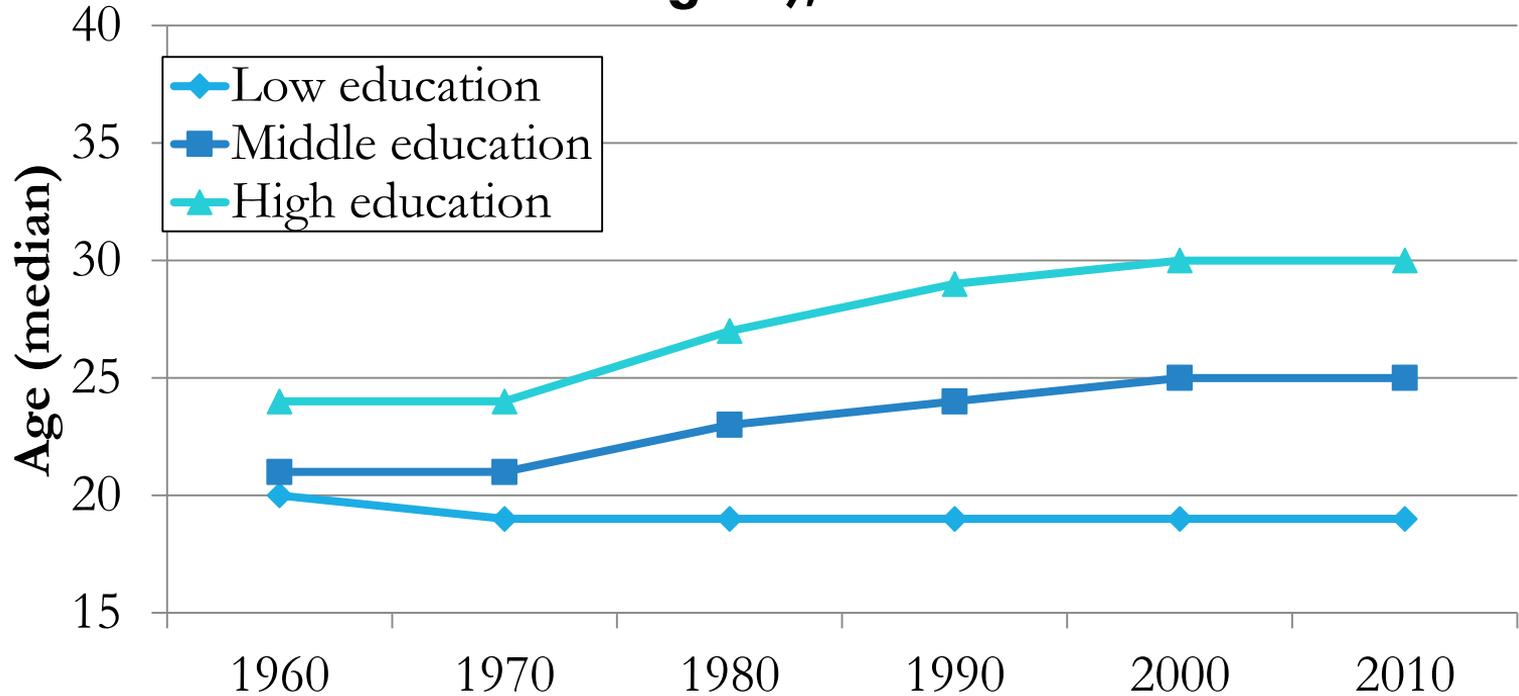
Fortunately racial/ethnic gaps in achievement have narrowed in the US

But Sean Reardon's work has called attention to large and growing achievement gaps between children from low and high socioeconomic status (SES) families

GROWING GAPS IN FAMILY RESOURCES

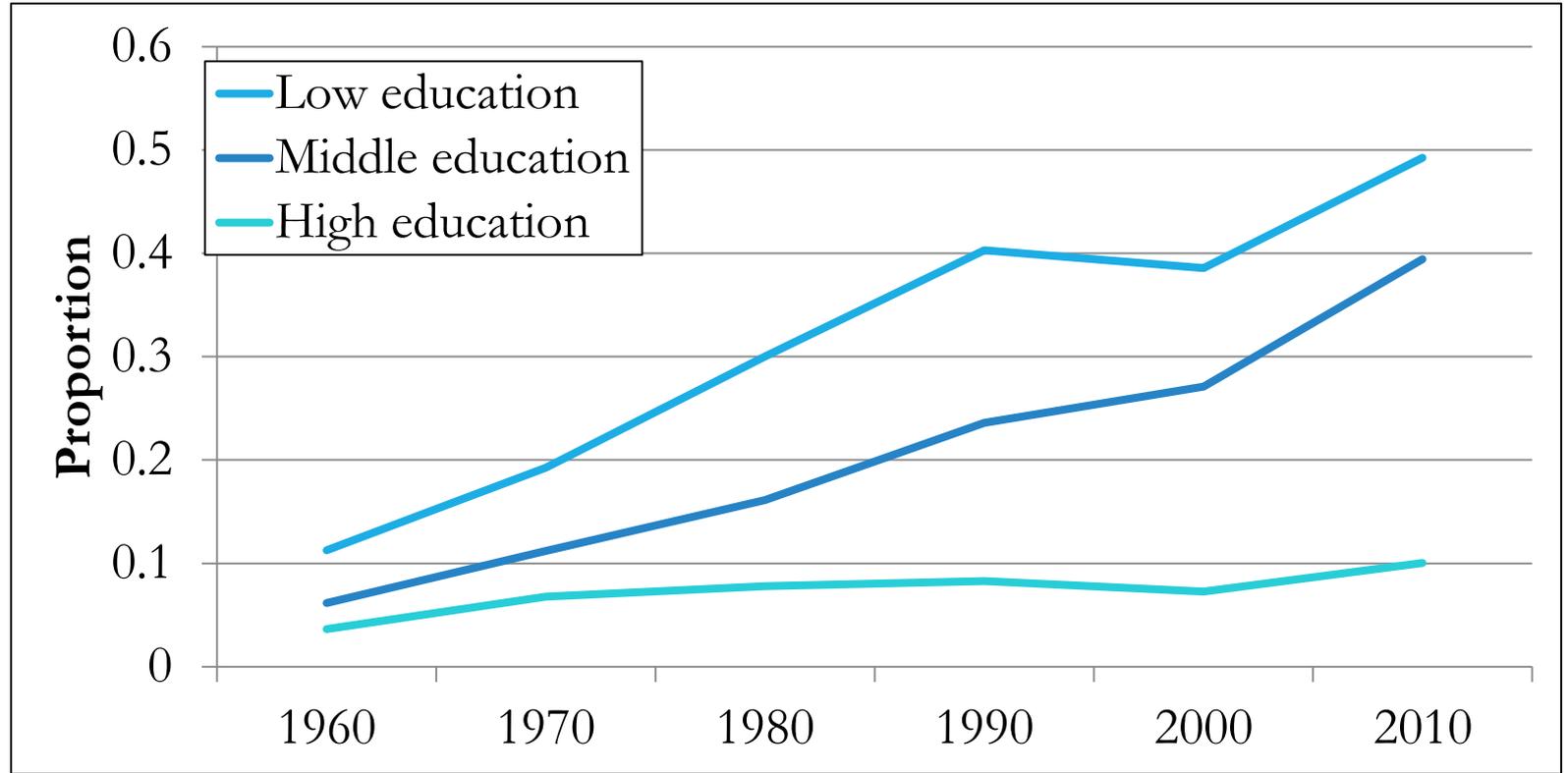
These growing SES gaps in achievement have occurred in parallel with growing gaps in family resources – a phenomenon that Sara McLanahan called “diverging destinies”

Mothers' Median Age (among those with children under age 5), 1960 to 2010



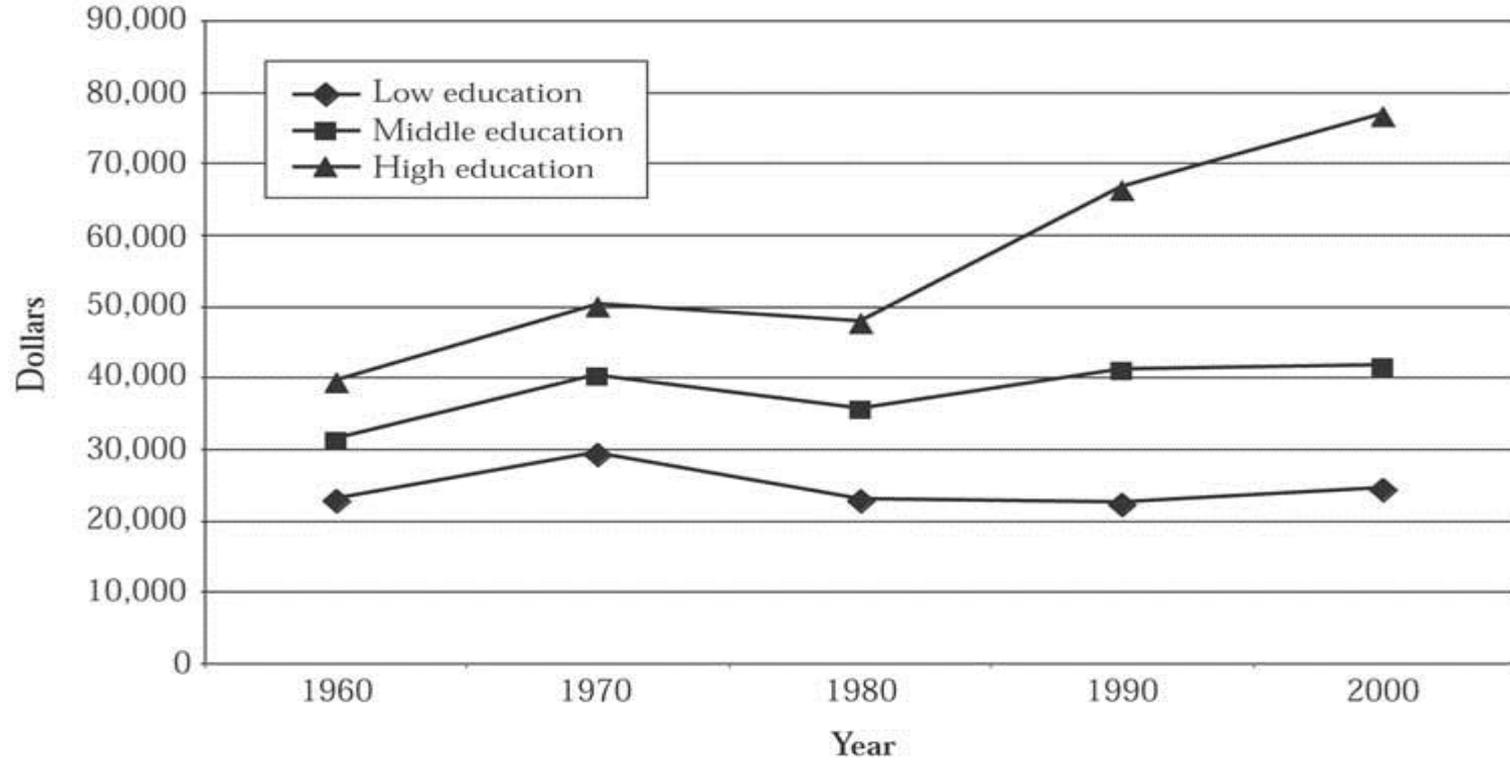
McLanahan, 2004, “Diverging Destinies”; McLanahan & Jacobsen, 2015 “Diverging Destinies Revisited” (Education defined by quartiles)

Single Motherhood, 1960 to 2010



McLanahan, 2004, "Diverging Destinies; McLanahan & Jacobsen, 2015, "Diverging Destinies Revisited"

Median Family Income, 1960 to 2000

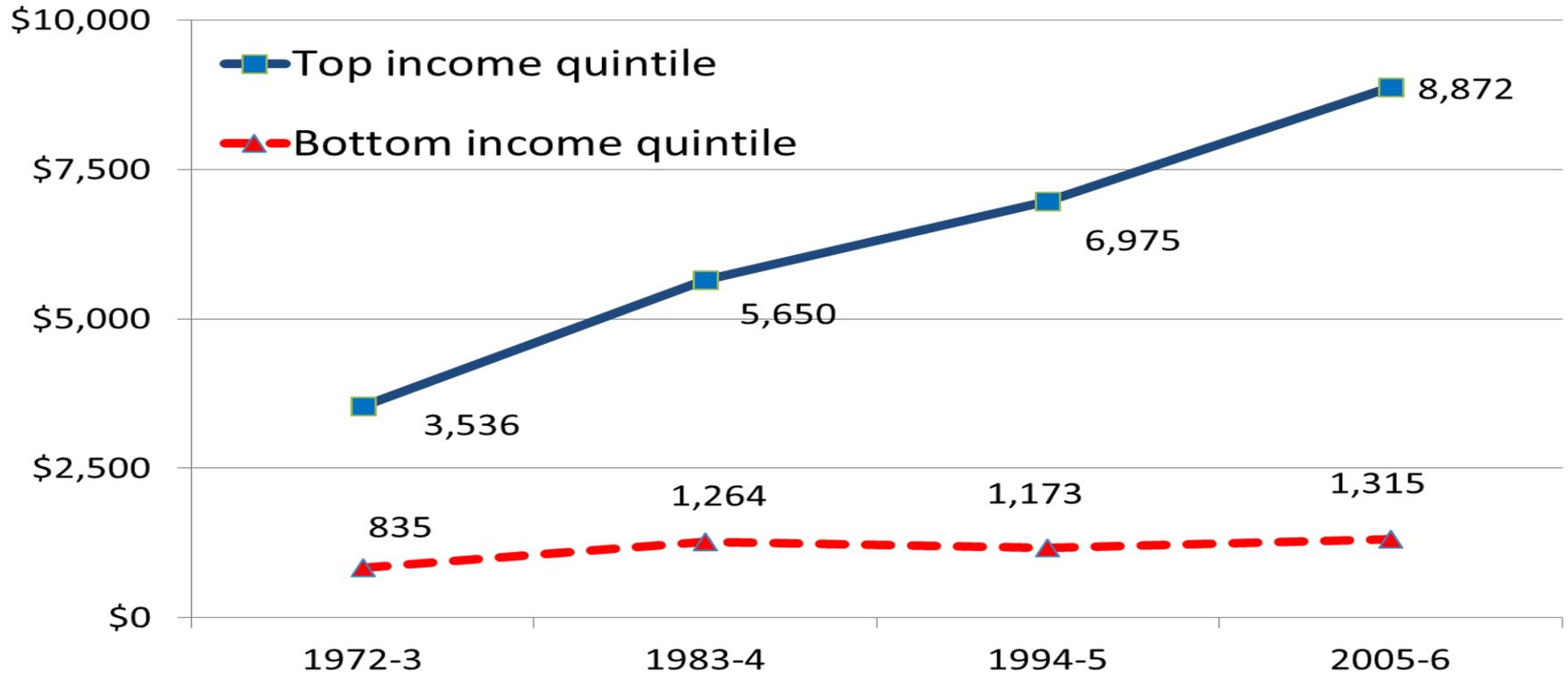


McLanahan, 2004 "Diverging Destinies"

GROWING GAPS IN INVESTMENTS IN CHILDREN

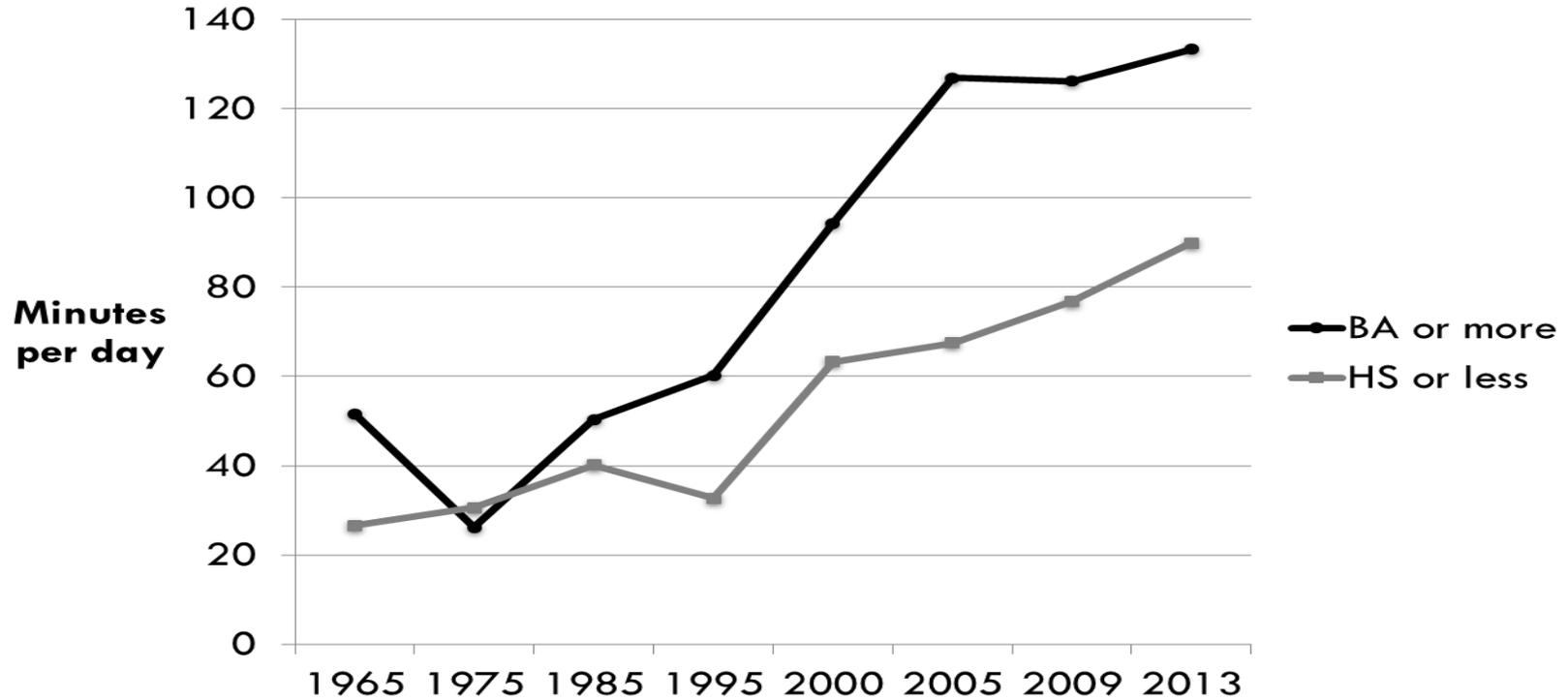
As family incomes have become more unequal, so too have investments in children

Enrichment Expenditures (2008\$) per Child, 1972-2006



Greg Duncan & Richard Murnane, 2011, *Whither Opportunity*

Time Spent by Both Parents in Developmental Childcare, Children Aged 0-4, 1965-2013

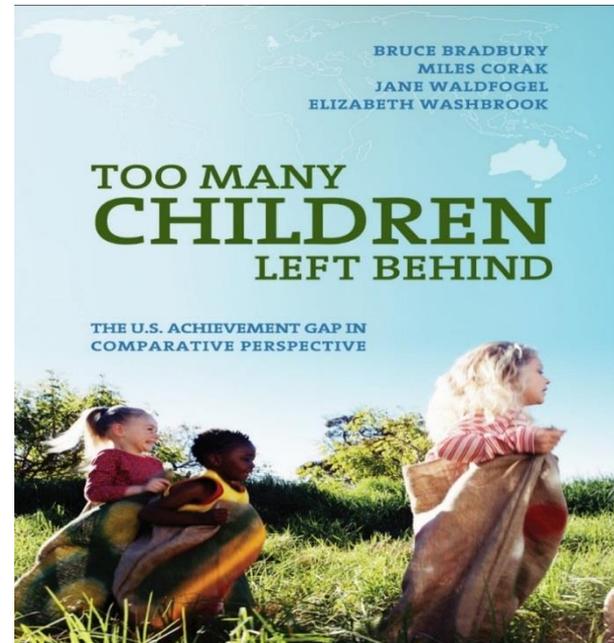


Robert Putnam, 2015, *Our Kids*

2. ARE PATTERNS SIMILAR ACROSS COUNTRIES?

In a recent book from Russell Sage Foundation, Bruce Bradbury, Miles Corak, Liz Washbrook, and I use cohort data to compare educational inequalities in:

US, UK, Canada, Australia



Box 1.1 The Child Cohort Studies

| | U.S. | U.K. | Australia | Canada |
|------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Survey name | Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) | Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) | Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Kindergarten Cohort (LSAC-K) | National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (NLSCY) |
| Cohort birth dates | 1992-1993 | 2000-2002 | 1999-2000 | 1991-1994 |
| Ages when children assessed | 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14 | 5, 7, 11 | 5, 9, 11 | 5, 7, 9, 11 |
| Sample size (balanced panel) | 8,370 | 11,762 | 3,940 | 4,346 |

MEASURING SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (SES)

We use parental education as our measure of SES – it is a good proxy for permanent income, can be comparably measured, and is an important input to child development

Based on the highest educated parent, we code families as

- low SES (HS or less)
- medium SES (some education beyond HS)
- high SES (BA or more)

SES & RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN

Although family resources are skewed by SES in all four countries, this inequality is starkest in the US (often followed by UK) (Fig 3.2-3.7)

Figure 3.2 Over one in five children in US families with low educated parents were born to a teen mother, but only three in one hundred in high-educated households

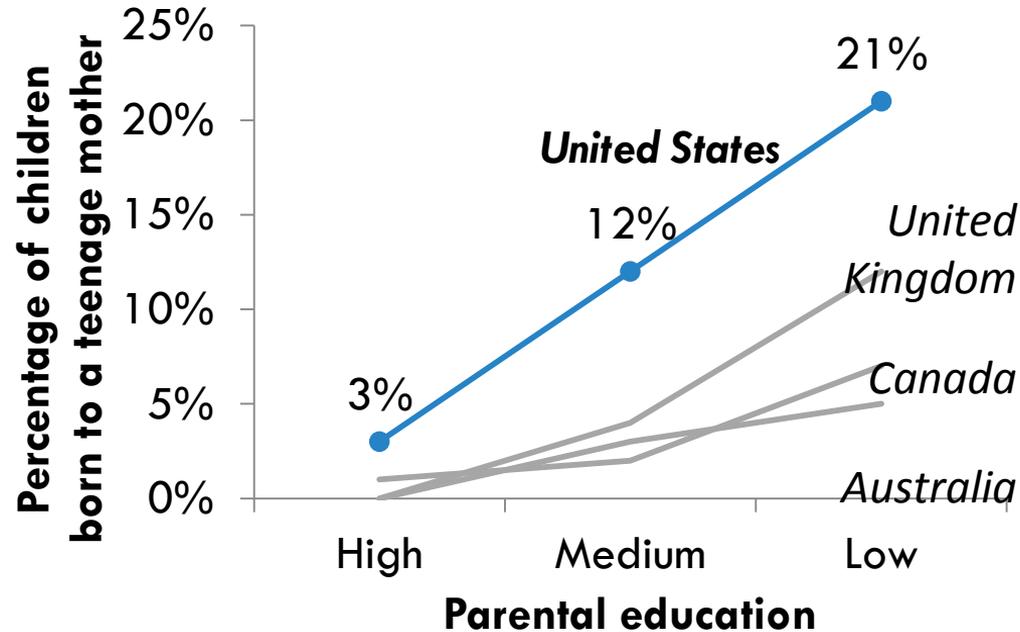


Figure 3.3 Children in the U.S. are least likely to be living with both biological parents

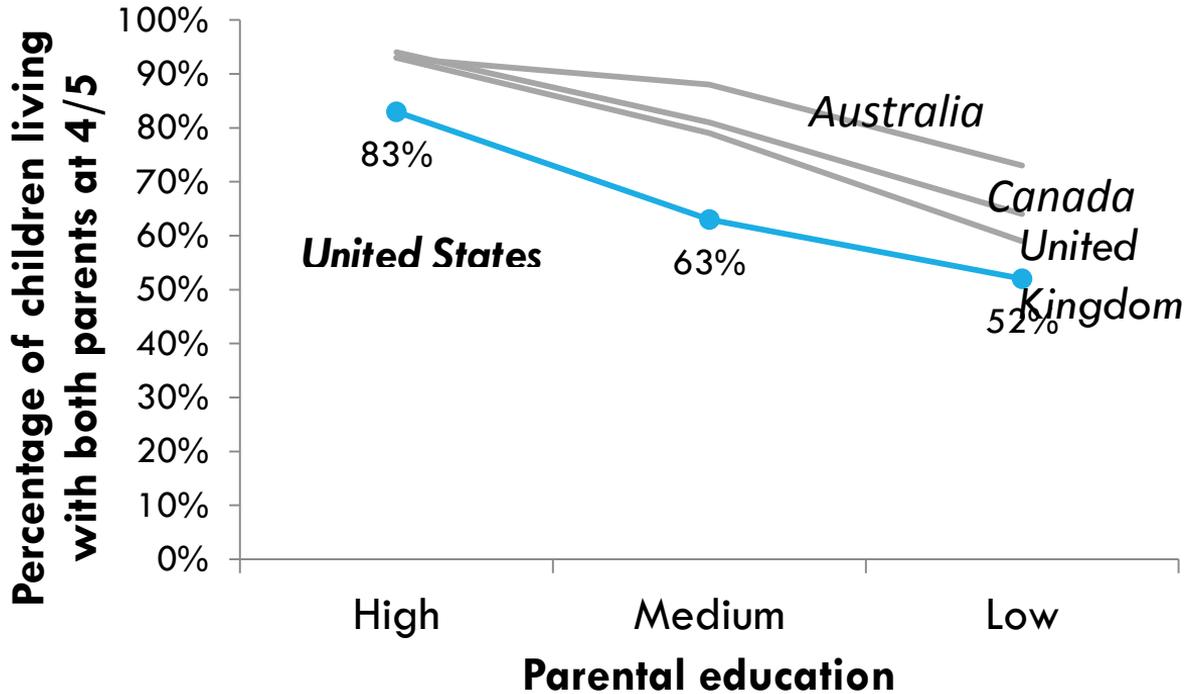


Figure 3.4 Although all four countries have many immigrant parents, in the U.S. children of the least educated parents are most likely to have an immigrant parent – but selective immigration policies means that the reverse applies in Australia and Canada.

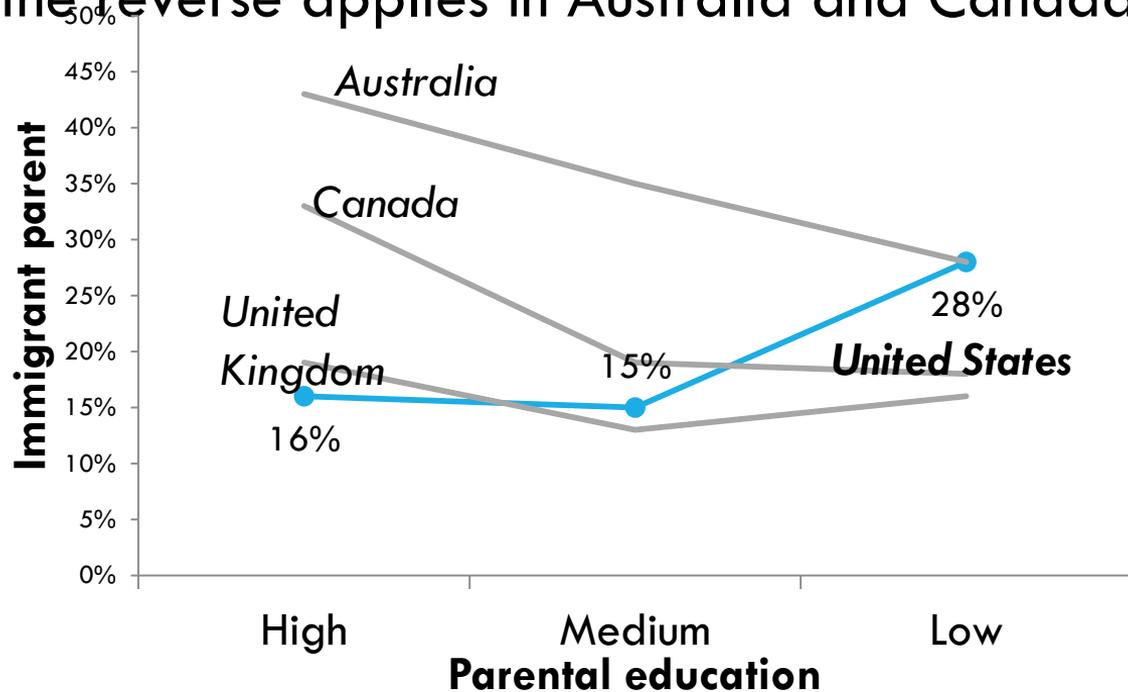


Figure 3.7 Highly educated parents are much more likely to read to their children every day. However, Canadian parents with low education read to their children as often as highly educated parents from the other three countries.

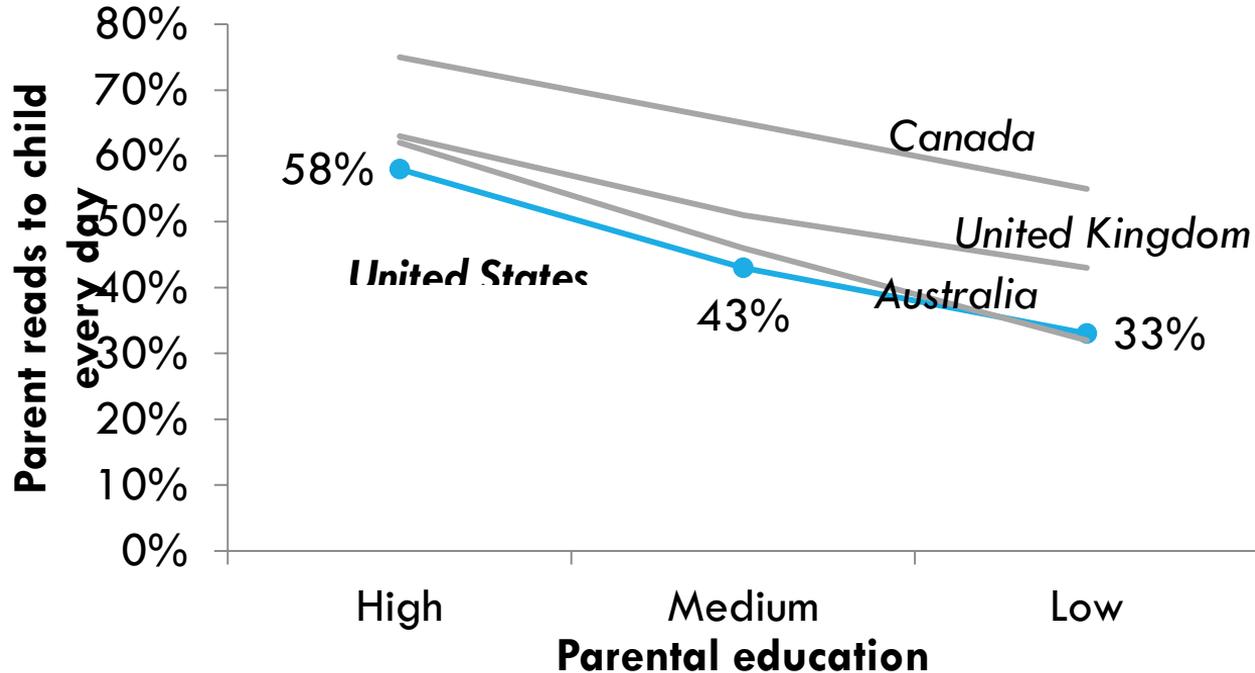
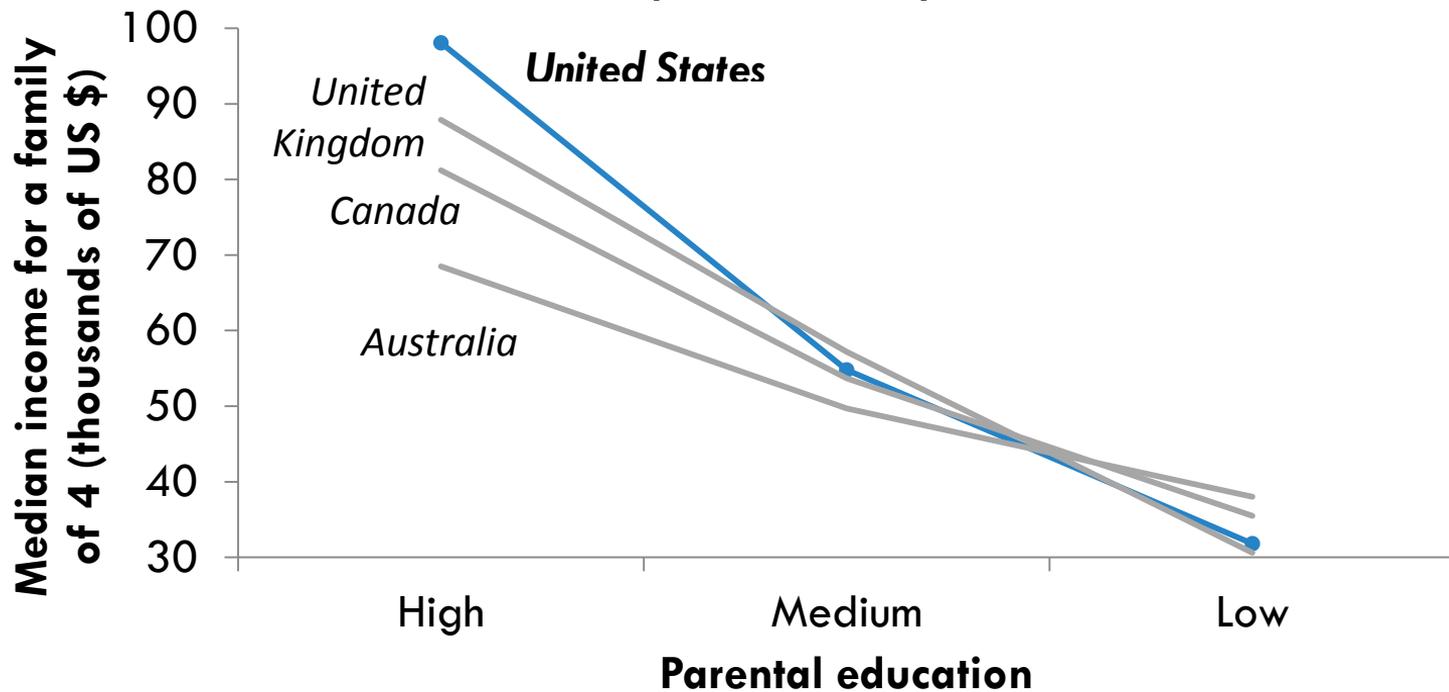


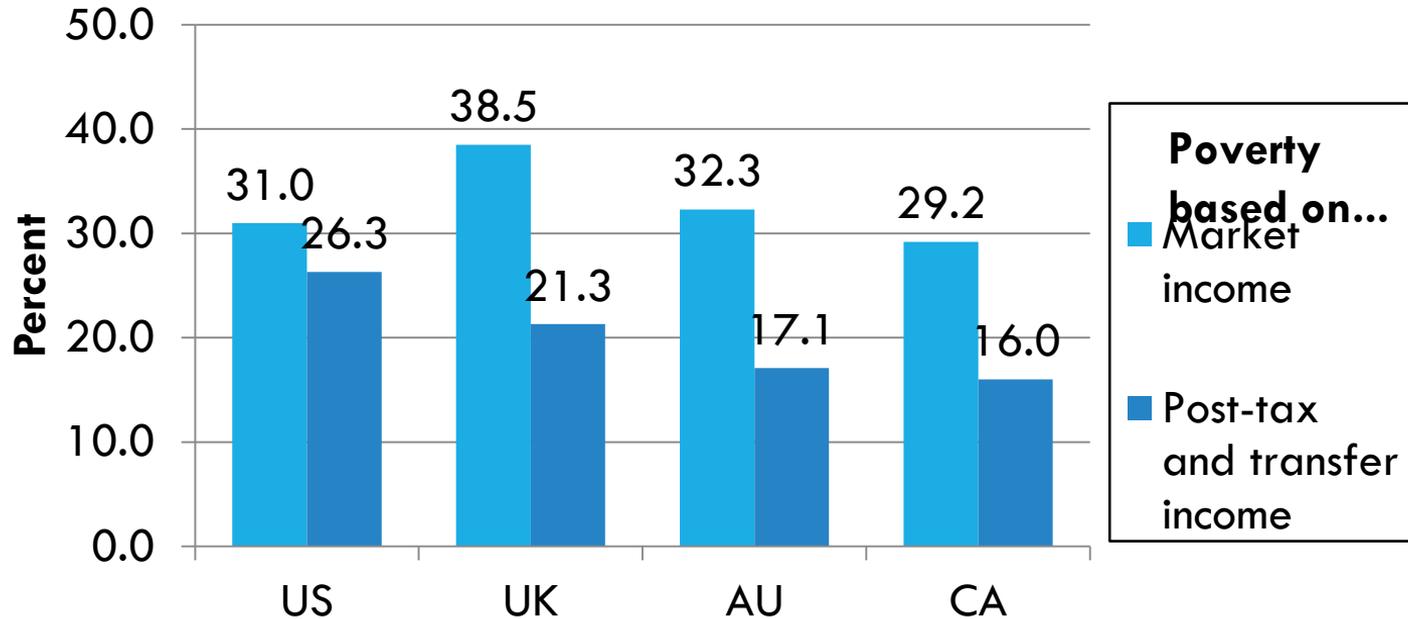
Figure 3.6 Incomes of high-educated families in the US are 1.8 times as large as in medium-educated families and three times as large as in low-educated families. Income differentials are markedly smaller in the UK, Canada, and particularly Australia.



SES & RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN

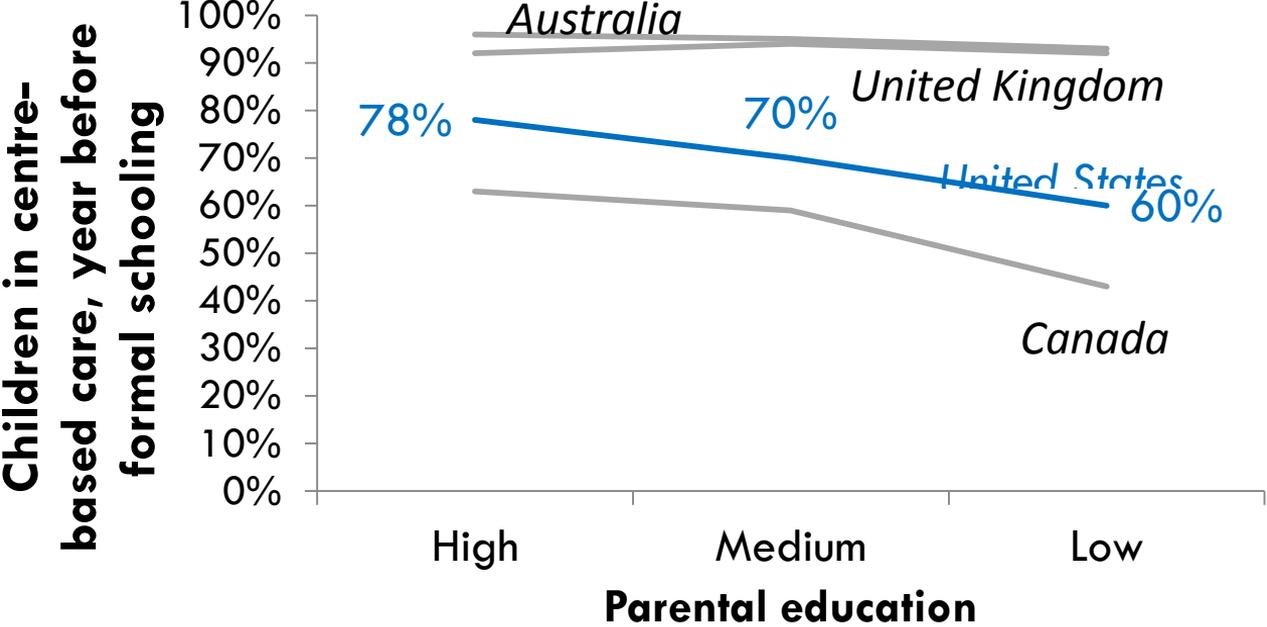
But, the US safety net and supports for working families do the least among the four countries to combat income inequality (Fig 3.8, Fig 4.4)

Figure 3.8 In the absence of government taxes and transfers, child poverty would be as high in the other countries as it is in the US. But government benefits do more to reduce poverty in the other countries than they do in the US.



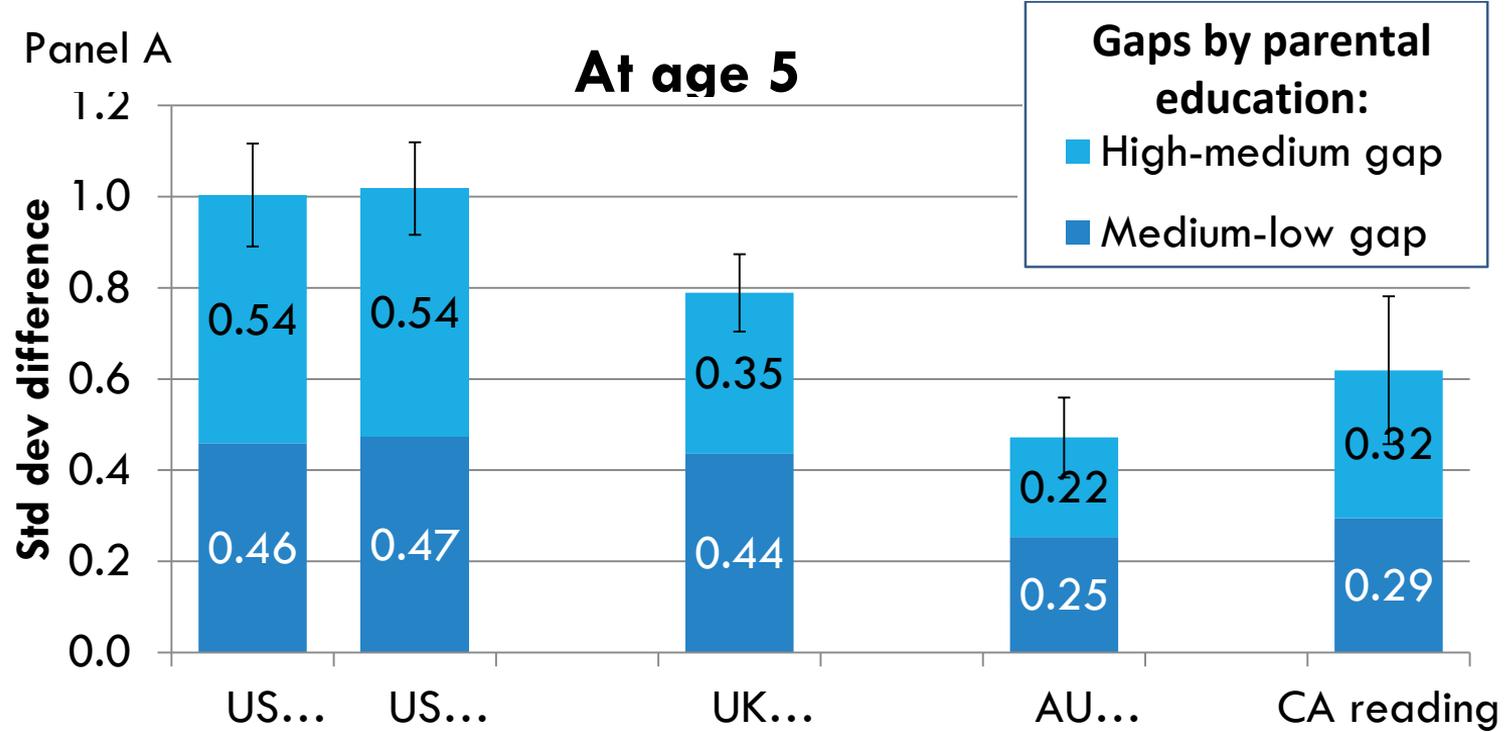
Source: Bradbury and Jantti (2001)

Figure A4.11 Australia and UK provide universal preschool, but in the US and Canada, enrollment varies by SES.



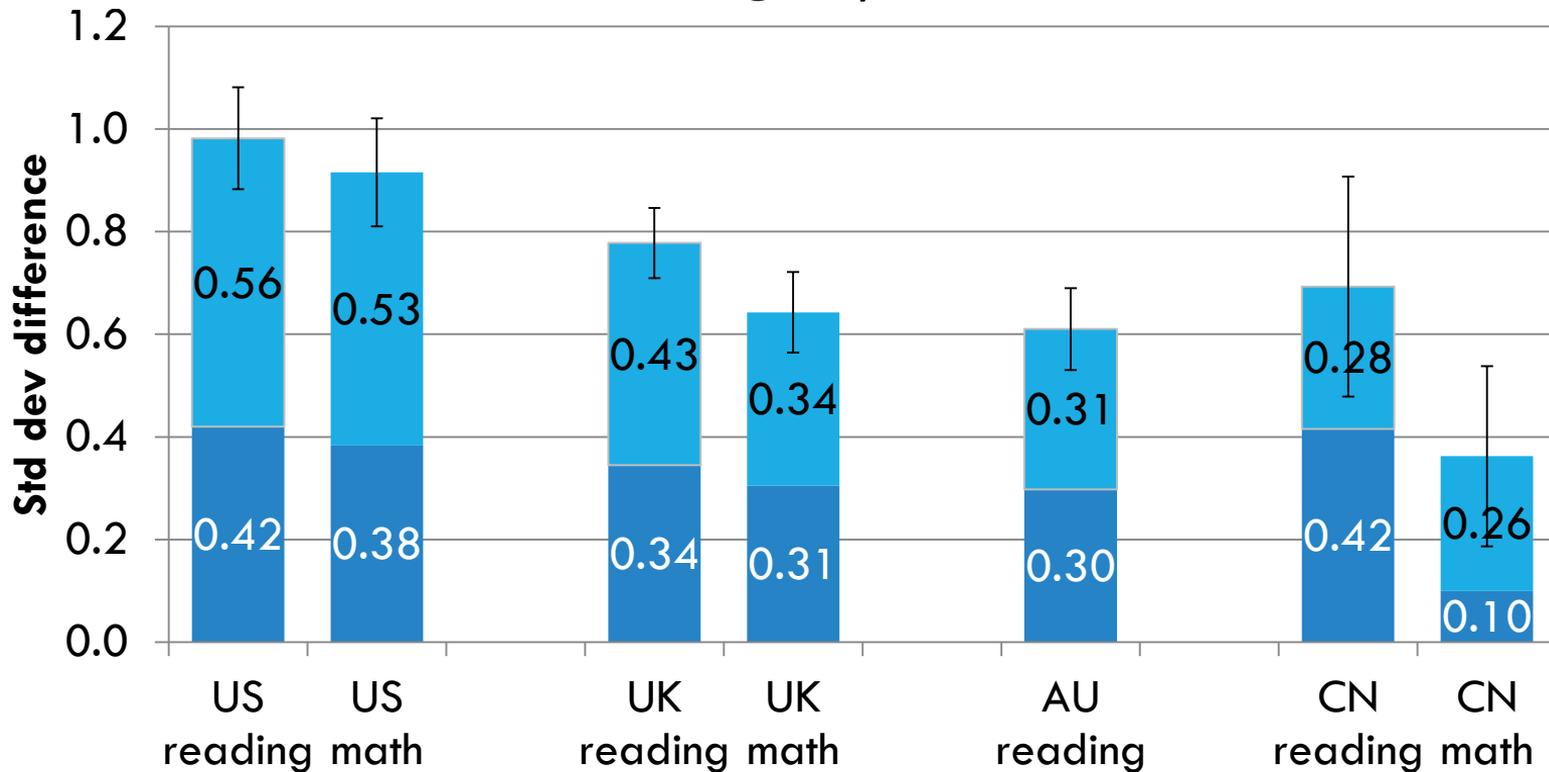
**SES & ACHIEVEMENT — THE US IS MOST UNEQUAL
(OFTEN FOLLOWED BY UK)**

Figure 5.1 Achievement gaps by parental education are largest in the US



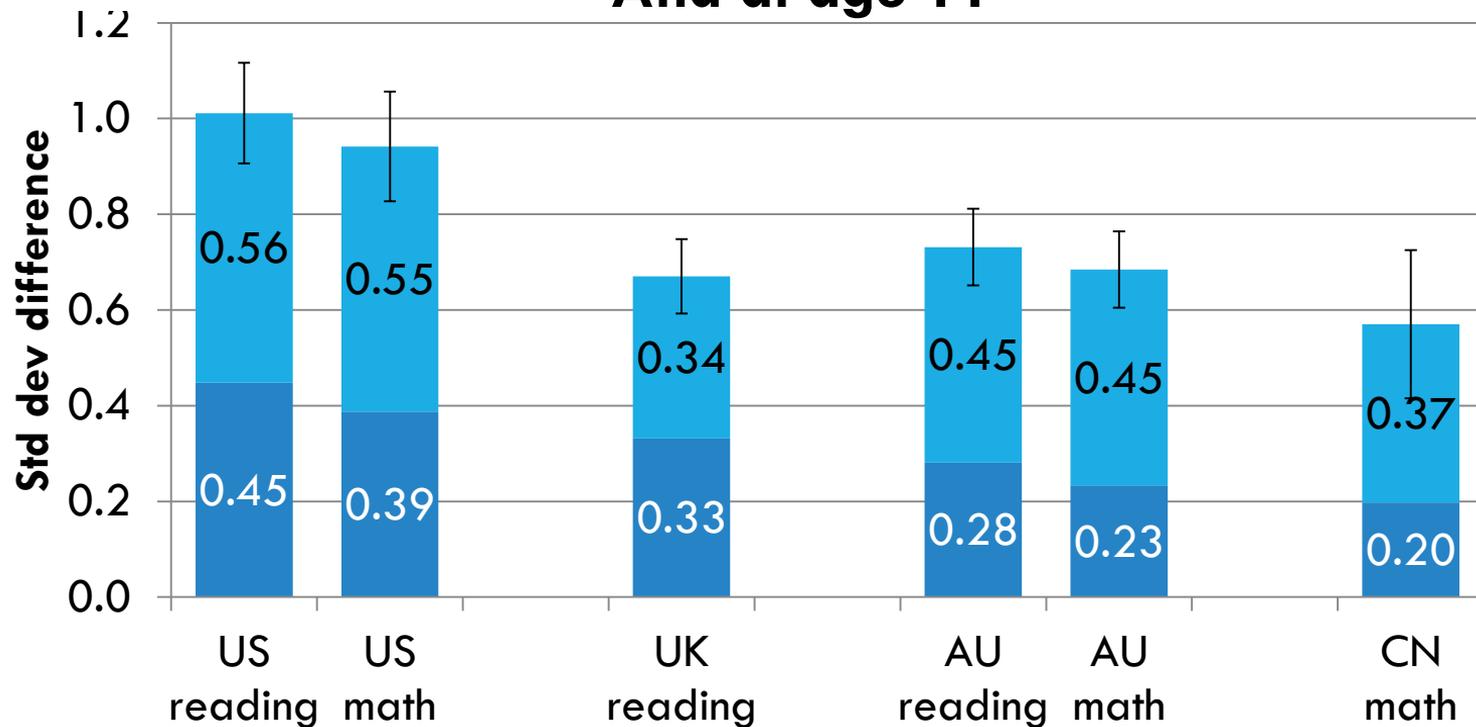
Panel B

At age 7/9



Panel C

And at age 11



3. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES & PROMOTE ECONOMIC/SOCIAL MOBILITY?

1. Evidence-based parenting and preschool programs to provide more support for early learning
2. Income support policies to raise family incomes for the poor and near-poor
3. Education policies to Improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools

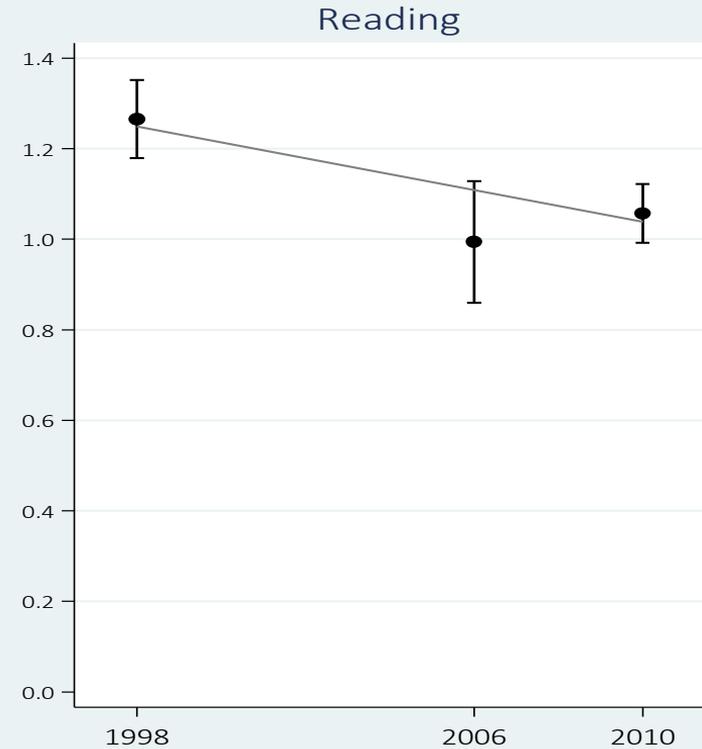
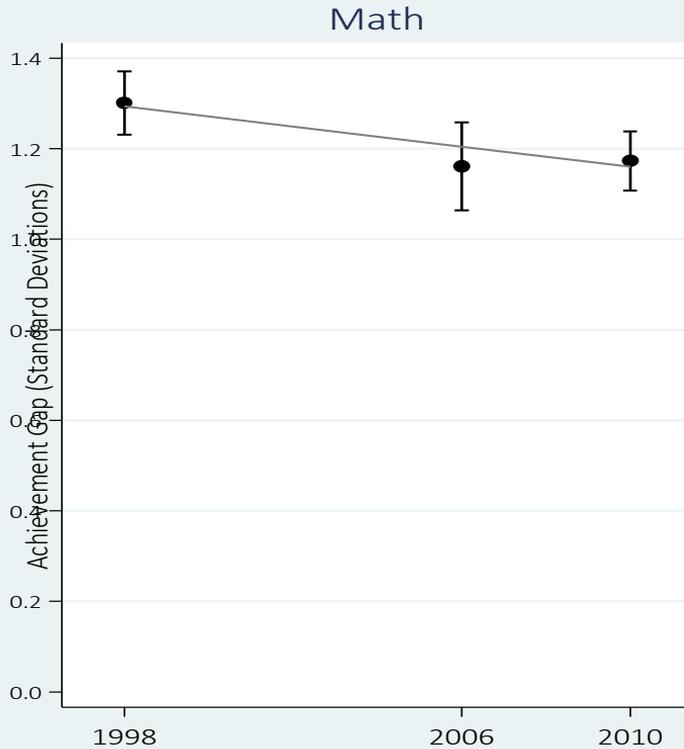
IN CONCLUSION: TOO MANY CHILDREN ARE BEING LEFT BEHIND – BUT WE CAN DO BETTER

The gaps and challenges in the US – and UK - are sobering

But the experience of peer countries suggests the US – and the UK - can and should do better

And, recent trends in school readiness within the US offer reason for hope

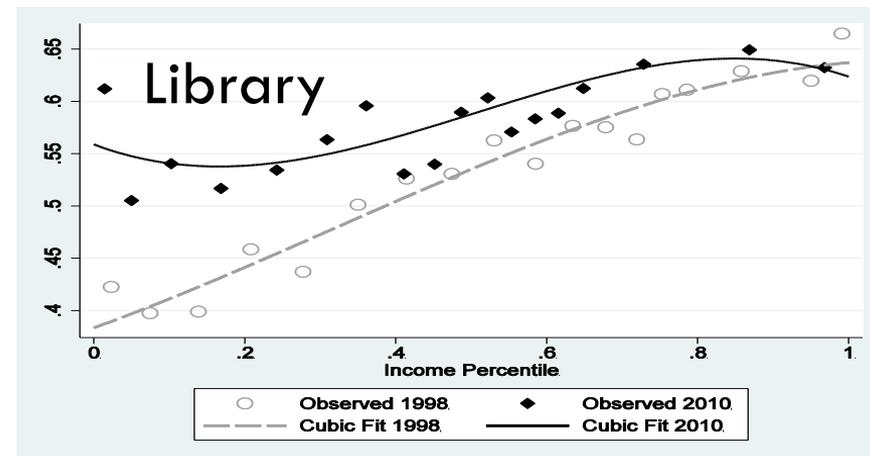
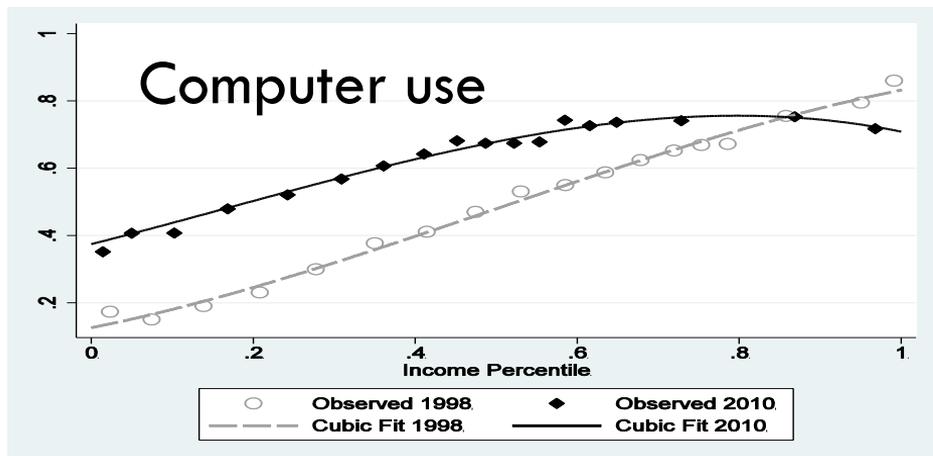
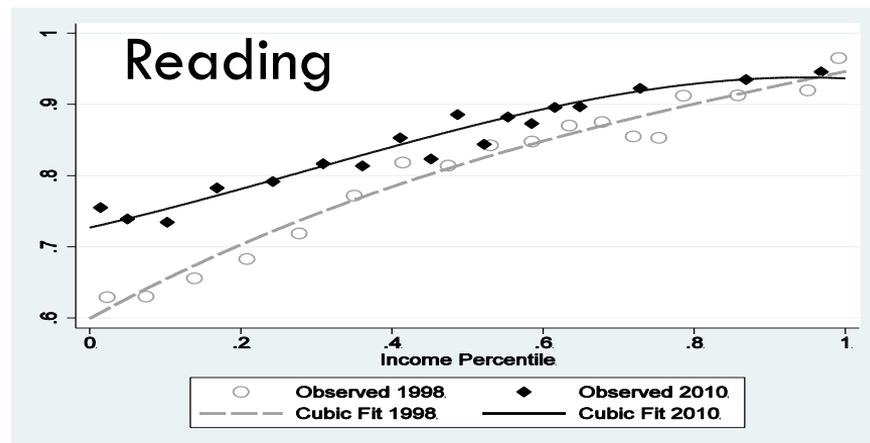
Change in Kindergarten Readiness 90-10 Income Gaps, 1998-2010



Source: Reardon and Portilla (2015).

Sean Reardon & Ximena Portilla, 2016, AERA Open

Narrowing gaps in parents reading books at least 3 times/week with children, use of a home computer for reading or math, and visits to library



MOVING FORWARD

Countries like the US and UK should commit to reduce educational inequalities – which cut across and underlie other forms of economic and social inequality

As rich nations, we can and should do better

THANKS

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