Beyond Parental Educational Attainment: How Parents' High School Experiences are

Associated with Young Children's Test Performance

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Abstract

Most researchers agree that there is a sizable correlation between parents' educational attainment and their children's educational outcomes. Parents' educational experiences are more complex than the number of years of schooling attained, yet little research explores how these experiences may influence the scholastic performance of their children. Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) we examine how parents' high school experiences are associated with children's educational achievement net of demographic and other socioeconomic differences.

Among parents who have less than a Bachelor's Degree, high school grades, type of high school, and highest math course taken are predictive of math, reading, and general knowledge scores of their kindergarten children. Parents' educational expectations for their children are positively associated with academic readiness, but this does not attenuate the influence of parents' high school experiences. Thus, high school experiences of parents delineate another route of intergenerational transfer of status and may help explain the disadvantage of minority youth beyond traditional measures of socioeconomic status.

Background

- Parents' educational attainment is associated with both higher educational expectations for their children and higher educational achievement and attainment of their children (Hallinan 1989; Sewell and Shah 1968; Sewell, Haller, and Portes 1969; Sewell, Haller, and Ohlendorf 1970; Kerckhoff and Campbell 1977; Campbell 1983; Jencks, Crouse, and Mueser 1983).
- Cultural capital is another pathway through which parents' socioeconomic status is related to child outcomes (Bourdieu 1973, 1986; DiMaggio 1982; Lareau 2000).
- We know little about how school experiences of parents may influence the scholastic performance of their children.

Research Questions

- What is the association between parents' educational experiences in high school and their children's academic readiness at the beginning of kindergarten?
- How do parents' educational expectations for their children mediate the relationship between parents' high school experiences and academic readiness?
- How does the relationship between parents' high school experiences and academic readiness at the beginning of kindergarten vary by race?

Data and Methods

- Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K)
 Nationally representative of kindergarteners in 1998-99
 Data from parents, students, teachers, and schools
 Oversampling of minority and immigrant groups
 N = 22,000
- Analytic sample

Biological mother or father of child
Respondent must have attended at least some high school but have
less than a Bachelor's degree
Respondent must be at least 23 years old
N = 10,755

Key Variables

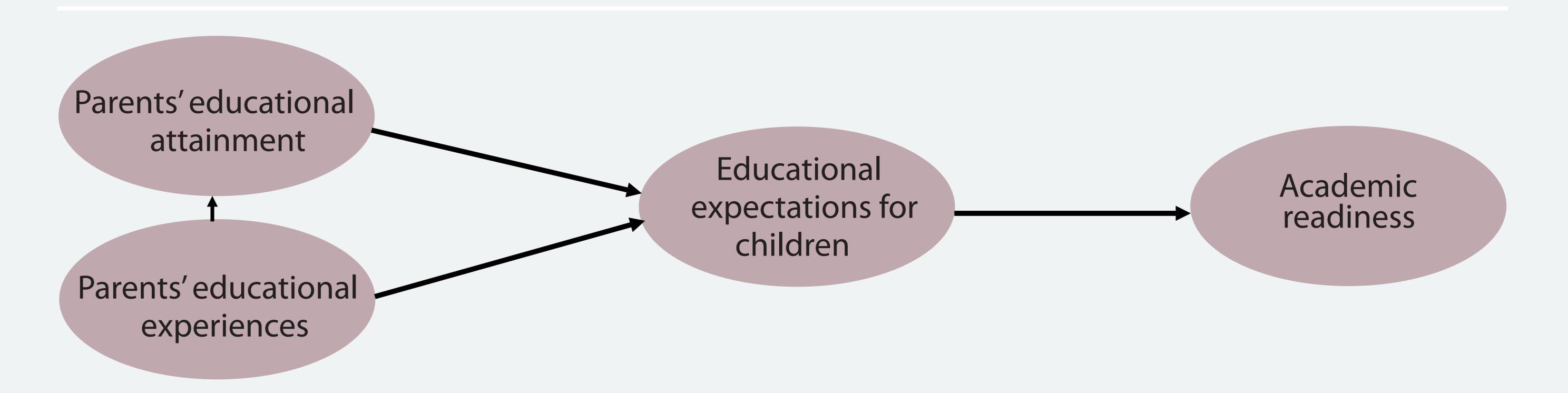
- Dependent variables
 - Children's math, reading, and general knowledge test scores
- Key independent variables

Parents' high school grades
Parents' high school type

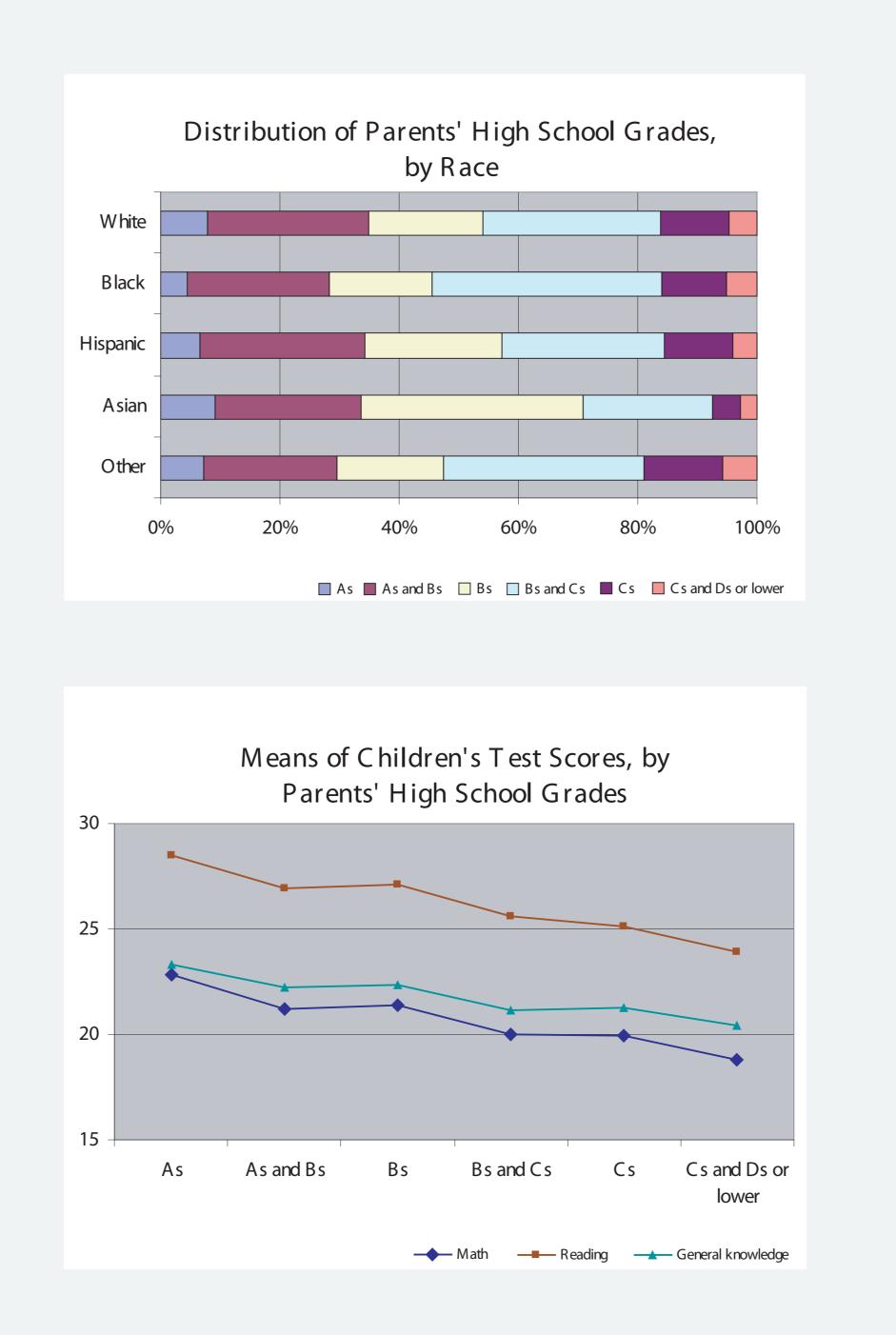
Parents' math courses taken

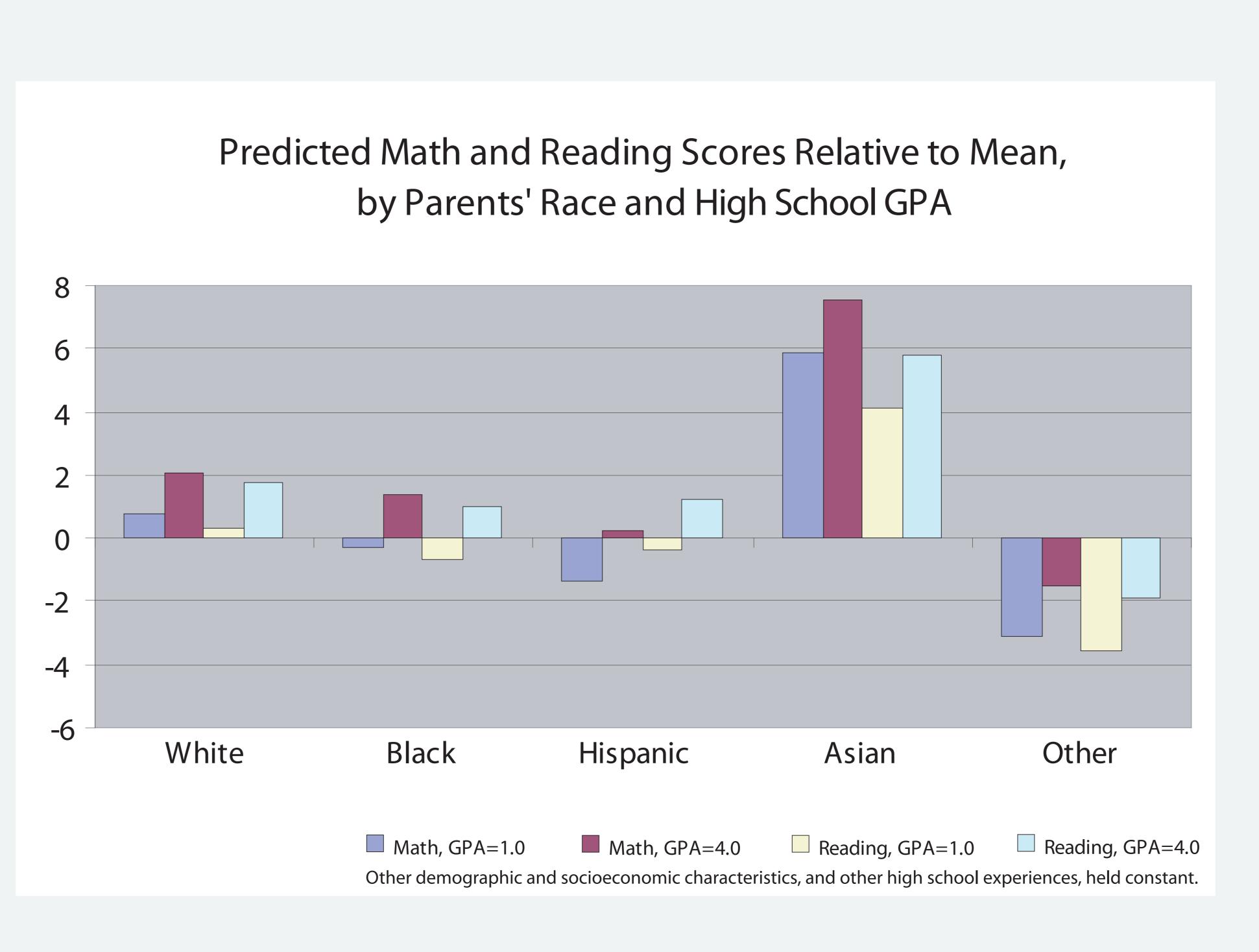
Parents' educational expectations for their children

Conceptual Model



Results





Results

- Among parents who have less than a Bachelor's Degree, high school grades are strongly predictive of math and reading test scores, and type of high school is strongly predictive of general knowledge test scores.
- Highest math course taken is generally not predictive of children's academic readiness at the beginning of kindergarten. But students whose parents did not take any math in high school are at a disadvantage.
- Parents' educational expectations for their children are positively associated with academic readiness, but this does not attenuate the relationship between parents' high school experiences and the academic readiness of their children.

Discussion

• High school experiences of parents delineate another route of intergenerational transfer of status and may help explain the disadvantage of minority youth beyond traditional measures of socioeconomic status.

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