

The Achievement Gap Doesn't Originate in Schools. It Can't Be Closed by Schools Either

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For 50 years, we've relied on schooling as America's core strategy to promote social and economic mobility across generations and build our nation's human capital.

Yet despite decades of heavy investment, aimed especially to improve the achievement of disadvantaged children, substantial proportions of lower-income students still fail to perform at even basic levels in reading and math. Achievement gaps between wealthier and poorer children remain huge.

And here's a big part of the problem:

A growing body of science has established that the crucial foundation for achievement, in school and beyond, is laid in children's earliest years, long before they enter kindergarten. Families are by far the most potent influence in children's lives.

Good schools can play an important role in children's learning and success. But our intense focus on schooling — rather than the non-school environments that powerfully shape children's outcomes — is insufficient to accomplish our aims. Research tells us that the achievement gap doesn't originate in schools. A half century of history tells us it can't be closed by schools either.