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racial discrimination and the substantial correlation across generations in SES, a number of good arguments can be made for reducing the black-white gap in income and wealth.[60] But would income redistribution toward African American families also serve to reduce the black-white test score gap? Not necessarily. Sociologist Susan Mayer has argued that once a family's basic needs are met, additional income from government programs may not improve how children perform in school.[61]

Efforts targeted at out-of-school factors do strike me as a potentially productive way to address the black-white test score gap, although the technology and politics of addressing those factors that might matter most are likely to be more difficult than simply sending low-income families larger earned-income tax credit checks. For example, changing how parents interact with their children may improve academic achievement, but some parents may be understandably resistant to government suggestions about how to raise their families.[62] Other research shows that living within a high-poverty neighborhood may depress children's educational outcomes.[63] Because African American families are more likely to live within high-poverty areas than whites, even after controlling for the family's own poverty status, efforts to further reduce economic and racial segregation across neighborhoods may help reduce the black-white test score gap.[64] While the United States has made some progress in reducing racial residential segregation, most American metropolitan areas remain quite segregated.[65]

In sum, future analyses of SAT and other education data by those within the education research community could be strengthened in a variety of ways to help identify the determinants of the black-white gap in academic achievement. However, even with such information in hand, a number of important unanswered questions remain about how to map the causes of the test score gap into effective policy interventions.

Comment by James Forman

The paper by Michael T. Nettles, Catherine M. Millett, and Douglas D. Ready makes an important contribution to the ongoing conversation about the racial gap in standardized test scores. Among other findings, the paper documents that blacks on average score lower on the SAT, American College Test (ACT), and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

than whites and that the disparities exist at all income and socioeconomic status (SES) levels. While I have no quarrel with the paper's findings, as a preliminary matter I do wonder whether a mistake is being made by focusing on income instead of wealth. Nettles, Millett, and Ready's research, like all the research in this field, is based on income comparisons. But as the work of Melvin Oliver, Thomas Shapiro, and Dalton Conley has made clear, income disparities can mask even greater wealth disparities. The real point may be that reductions in income disparities—as more African American families enter the middle class—mask large and continuing disparities in wealth. In other words, black families, on average, do not have the same household wealth as white families with comparable incomes (factoring in savings, home value, and so on). Because wealth, even more than income, allows families to purchase important educational goods at every stage of a child's development, research on racial gaps needs to begin to take account of differences in wealth.

Nettles, Millett, and Ready's research also raises a more fundamental question: Is it a mistake to speak of the racial gap in standardized test scores and to overlook the greater consequences of the gap when disadvantaged kids are the ones on the losing side?

I would suggest that more than one racial gap is at work and that the racial gap has more dire consequences for kids at the bottom end of the social class hierarchy. My position is based in part on personal experience, because I have been on the wrong side of the racial achievement gap in both contexts. In seventh grade, I went to Hunter College High School in New York City, which is a school for high achievers and is, at least in a relative sense, a high socioeconomic status school. The racial test score gap was obvious, and as a result of it, most of the black and Latino students were required to go to summer school before seventh grade started. Though I left Hunter after one year, I stayed in touch with some of the minority students I entered with. Upon graduation from Hunter, they went off en masse to college and university.

After leaving Hunter I moved to Atlanta and went to Franklin Roosevelt High School—a mostly black, low socioeconomic status public school. The differences between the educational opportunities available at Hunter and Roosevelt were stark. I loved my school, my classmates, and my teachers, but I am not proud of the reality that fewer than ten of the kids in my graduating class went on to finish college.

Though I have not seen the research, I would imagine, based on the work

of Nettles and others, that the African American students at Hunter and Roosevelt both performed at a lower rate than white students of comparable socioeconomic status. And I guess that this reflects a black-white test score gap. But the consequences of the test score gap for the students at Hunter and the students at Roosevelt are dramatically different. And I personally believe that the more pressing issue today is the Roosevelts of the inner cities—the schools where only a few kids are going to college and more are dropping out, getting pregnant, or, in many cases, getting locked up.

The importance of the question of educating disadvantaged students is reflected in some of the papers presented at the Brookings conference. David P. Baker's excellent paper discusses how the achievement gap between advantaged students and disadvantaged students in this country is much greater than in many others around the world. Hilary Pennington's paper brilliantly points out the ways in which the one-size-fits-all model of the American high school is failing disadvantaged students. It also begins to move educators and policymakers in the direction they need to go: beyond identifying problems and toward discussing solutions. One proposal is to move low SES students into higher SES schools. Both the Nettles, Millett, and Ready paper and Richard Kahlenberg's work suggest that this might make a difference.

But, in most jurisdictions, no such reform is likely to be implemented anytime soon. It might happen more easily in districts that already have a mix of students, in terms of race and class. But it will not happen soon in urban districts such as Washington, D.C., where almost all of the schools are high-poverty schools. The concept of school for the population of students in these districts must be radically changed.

This is what David Domenici and I tried to do when we started the Maya Angelou Public Charter School in Washington, D.C. Maya Angelou students are in school ten and a half hours a day, studying mostly core subjects. When not in class, they work in student-run businesses, where they earn money and learn practical job skills. The results have been impressive. More than half of the students had stopped attending school on a regular basis before they came to Maya Angelou. Over one-third had been acquainted with the juvenile court system. Nonetheless, more than 80 percent of Maya Angelou graduates go on to college.

The first priority for high-poverty schools is to take responsibility for, and be equipped to respond to, the range of problems that have long been associated with poor academic and behavioral performance. The problems have been identified, but the society is not equipping schools to deal with

them and educators are too often unwilling to change what they do to address these problems.

While no single prototype exists for a successful school, almost everyone agrees on some essential components: sustained relationships with caring adults, a peer culture that pushes students to excel academically, a rigorous and engaging curriculum, an administration dedicated to supporting its frontline staff, sustained parental involvement in learning, and meaningful connections to the workplace and to higher education. In addition, as Diane Ravitch has been saying, adults cannot retreat. My experience at Maya Angelou makes this clear. If you ask students at Maya Angelou why the school is working, they will tell you it is because "the teachers are always in our business." Now, they will complain about this all day long when they talk to teachers and counselors at the school. But when they take a step back and talk to outside evaluators, they will always point to this feature.

For schools serving this population, extended hours are also essential, both for academic enrichment purposes and to provide a safe and nurturing after-school environment, given that kids will otherwise spend a significant portion of their day in chaotic and violent neighborhoods.

Given the trauma that comes from growing up in these neighborhoods, another key is to build intensive counseling into the core school curriculum. I am not referring just to guidance counselors, although, as others at the Brookings conference mentioned, their role is important. I am talking about licensed clinical social workers. I am talking about psychologists. I am talking about people who are prepared to work with kids who are suffering from untreated trauma, from depression, and from a host of other mental health issues that predominate in these communities but are rarely addressed, admitted to, or even discussed.

Finally, schools must make a commitment to creating a culture or climate of mutual respect, trust, and high achievement. It has to be a whole school commitment, and it has to be relentless. Adults have to take responsibility for the little stuff that students do or say that can harm the school climate—the comments in the hallways, the teasing in the cafeteria, the touching and grabbing when kids think adults are not around. I do not suggest schools respond with zero tolerance and expulsions for idiotic reasons. Adults in schools need to respond with meaningful counseling and conversations, forging relationships with individual kids, so that students and teachers can work together to establish a school climate that promotes both discipline and academic achievement.

One final word—on funding. Having started a school in a high-poverty neighborhood that people point to as successful, I am not going to say that funding and resources do not make a difference. But it does seem to me, in some of these contexts, thinking about funding has to start to change. In some cases, money is already being spent on disadvantaged kids. But it is not being targeted intelligently. Cities are spending money on after-school programs through one agency, spending money on counseling and mental health through another, and funding youth employment through a third. The result is that cities have created these disconnected silos. Kids and families are treated as if they were a bizarre constellation of needs. The assumption is that if they can just go across town with a referral for mental health treatment, they can go over here for a job training program, and then go someplace else for after-school activities.

That is not how anything works. And it is certainly not how things work in a kid's life. Sometimes a little common sense must be applied. Someone must say, "Wait a minute—why does a kid come back to a place?" Well, he or she comes back because of the personal connections with the people there, not because a program, in name, does a specific thing. If those who care about schools can redefine school as a place that does all the things I have described, and redirect the funding so that kids and families can gain access to these services in one integrated program, they will have gone a long way toward making schools work for kids and families in high-poverty areas.

Notes

1. For example, J. S. Coleman and others, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Government Printing Office, 1966); M. T. Nettles and R. A. Thoeny, *Toward Black Undergraduate Student Equality in American Higher Education* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988); L. V. Hedges and A. Nowell, "Changes in the Black-White Gap in Achievement Test Scores," *Sociology of Education,* vol. 72, no. 2 (1999), pp. 111—35; and C. Jencks and M. Phillips, "The Black-White Test Score Gap: An Introduction," in C. Jencks and M. Phillips, eds., *The Black-White Test Score Gap* (Brookings, 1998), pp. 1—51.

2. M. T. Nettles and L. W. Perna, *African American Education Data Book,* vol. 2: *Preschool through High School Education* (Fairfax, Va.: Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute of the College Fund/United Negro College Fund, 1997); and V. E. Lee and D. T. Burkam, "Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background and Achievement at Kindergarten Entry," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 2002.

3. Jencks and Phillips, "The Black-White Test Score Gap," pp. 1-51.