

# Race, Parental SES, and K-12 Schooling

**Jordan A. Conwell, PhD**

Departments of Sociology and Educational Policy Studies

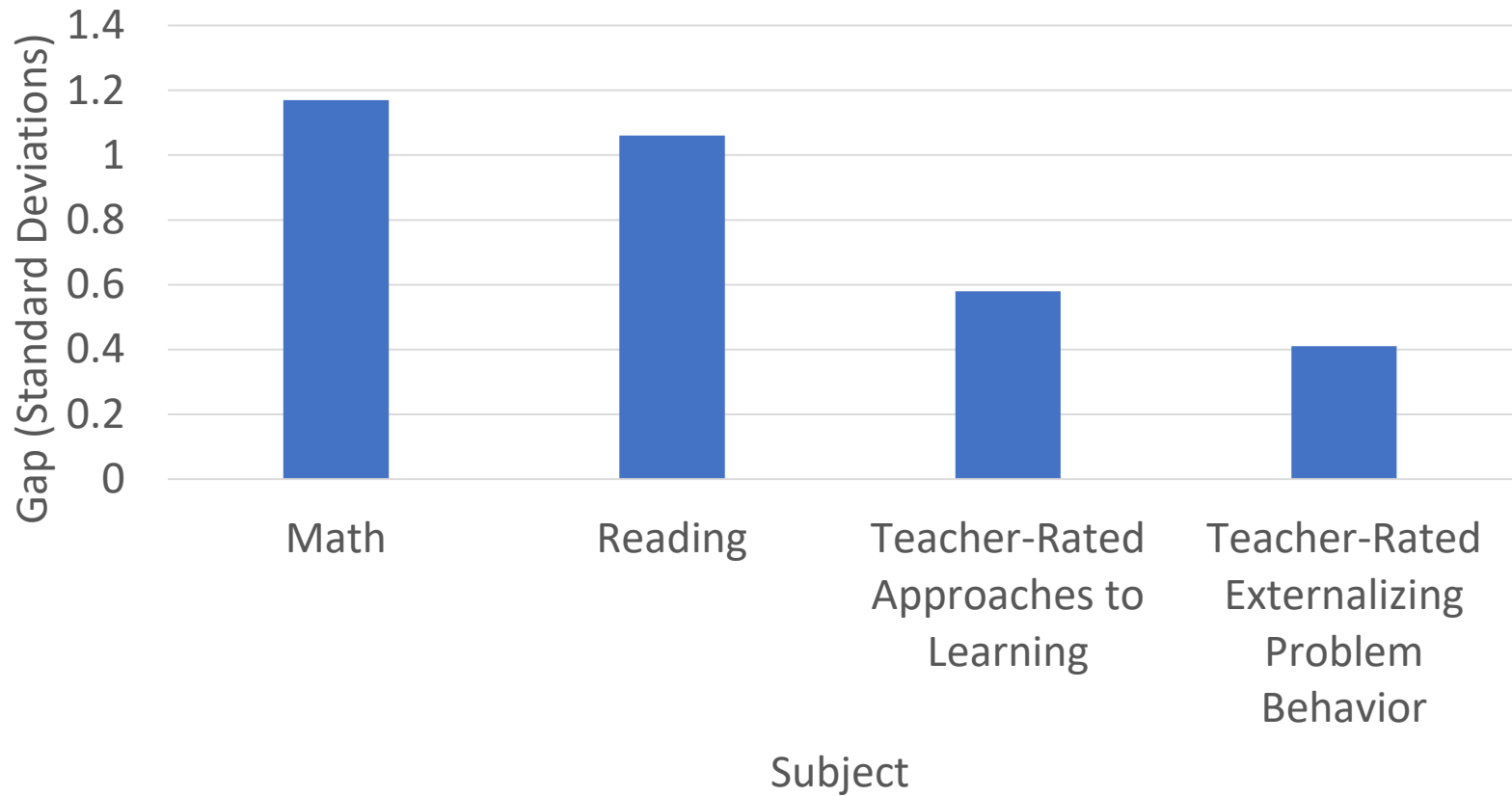
University of Wisconsin-Madison

IRP Faculty Affiliate

# Overview of talk

- Parental income and children's school readiness
  - How and why race matters, kindergarten class of 2010
- Parental income and children's achievement since *Brown*
  - Comparison of income and race trends
  - How and why race matters, high school cohorts from 1960-2010
- **In K-12 schooling, the experience of family poverty (and of family affluence) has, and continues to, differ by race.**
  - **Implications for teaching, research, and policy.**

## School Readiness Gaps Between Children Whose Parents are at 90th vs. 10th Income Percentile, Kindergarten Class of 2010



Source: Reardon and Portilla (2016)

“[A]t the same time that family income has become more predictive of children’s academic achievement, so have educational attainment and cognitive skills become more predictive of adults’ earnings...As the children of the rich do better in school, and those who do better in school are more likely to become rich, we risk producing an even more unequal and economically polarized society.” -Reardon (2011, p. 111)



**Economic  
Policy  
Institute**

**BROADER,  
BOLDER  
APPROACH  
TO EDUCATION**

## **Education inequalities at the school starting gate**

Gaps, trends, and strategies to address them

**Report** • By Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss • September 27, 2017

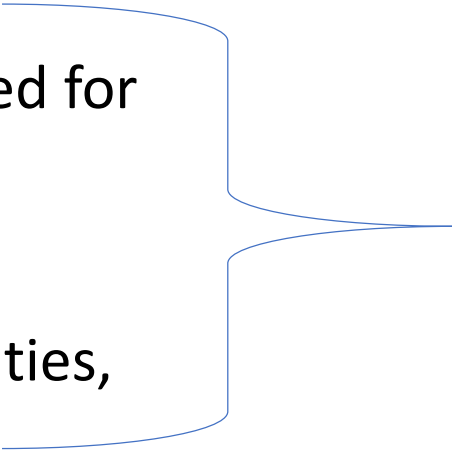


Why do children of affluent parents begin school more ready to learn (Bassok et al. 2016; Garcia and Weiss 2017)?

- Compared to children of disadvantaged parents:
  - Stronger parental beliefs about skills needed for kindergarten, higher parental educational attainment expectations
  - More children's books, home literacy activities, learning activities (e.g., museum trips)
  - *Demographics*: higher parental education and likelihood of being married

# Why do children of affluent parents begin school more ready to learn (Bassok et al. 2016; Garcia and Weiss 2017)?

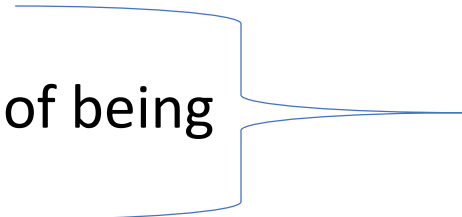
- Compared to children of disadvantaged parents:
  - Stronger parental beliefs about skills needed for kindergarten, higher parental educational attainment expectations
  - More children's books, home literacy activities, learning activities (e.g., museum trips)
  - Higher parental education and likelihood of being married



Developmental psych: parental SES related to children's early development via "beliefs and behaviors" (Davis-Kean 2005)

# Why do children of affluent parents begin school more ready to learn (Bassok et al. 2016; Garcia and Weiss 2017)?

- Compared to children of disadvantaged parents:
  - Stronger parental beliefs about skills needed for kindergarten, higher parental educational attainment expectations
  - More children's books, home literacy activities, learning activities (e.g., museum trips)
  - Higher parental education and likelihood of being married



Demography: “Diverging destinies” and the second demographic transition (McLanahan 2004)

# Race, class, and life chances

- Race and class intersect to influence Blacks' social experiences and outcomes
  - *Intragenerational*: how one fares in institutions such as schooling and the labor market
  - *Intergenerational*: transmission of (dis)advantage from parents to children
- Pioneering Black sociologists (e.g., W.E.B. Du Bois)
- Process of stratification tradition (Blau and Duncan, Featherman and Hauser)
- Decades of subsequent work (e.g, Massey and Broadmann 2014)

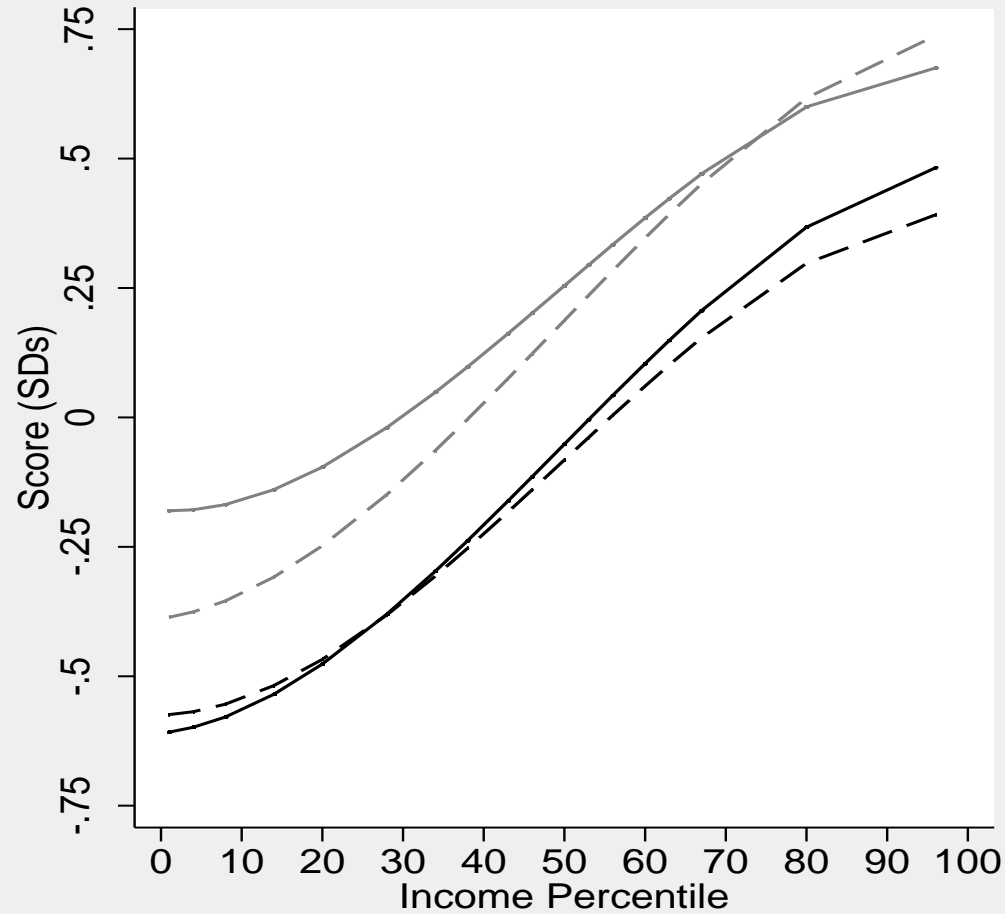


# Questions about income gaps in school readiness

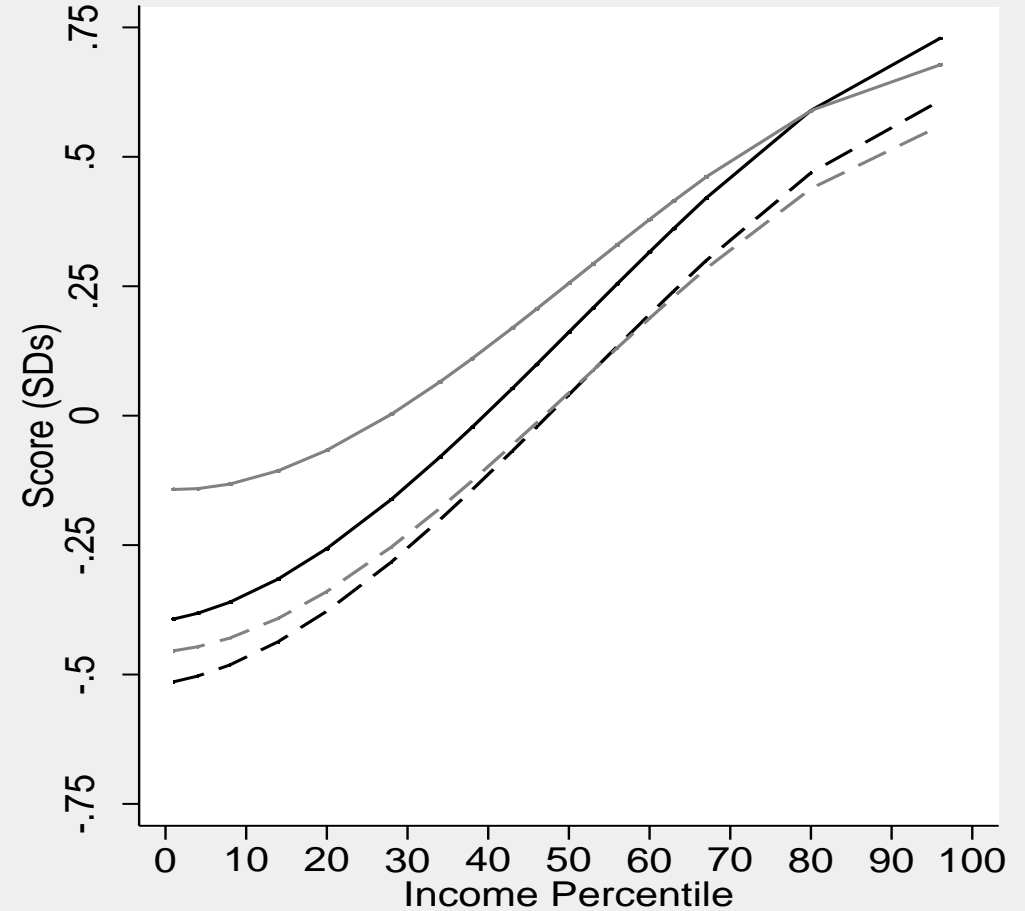
1. Do Black children receive the same school readiness returns to their parents' incomes that White children do?
2. If not, why not (relative to the beliefs, behaviors, and demographics explanations)?
3. What are the implications of 1 and 2 for early childhood education policy?

# Fall Kindergarten Academic Skills, by Race, Gender, and Income Percentile

## Math



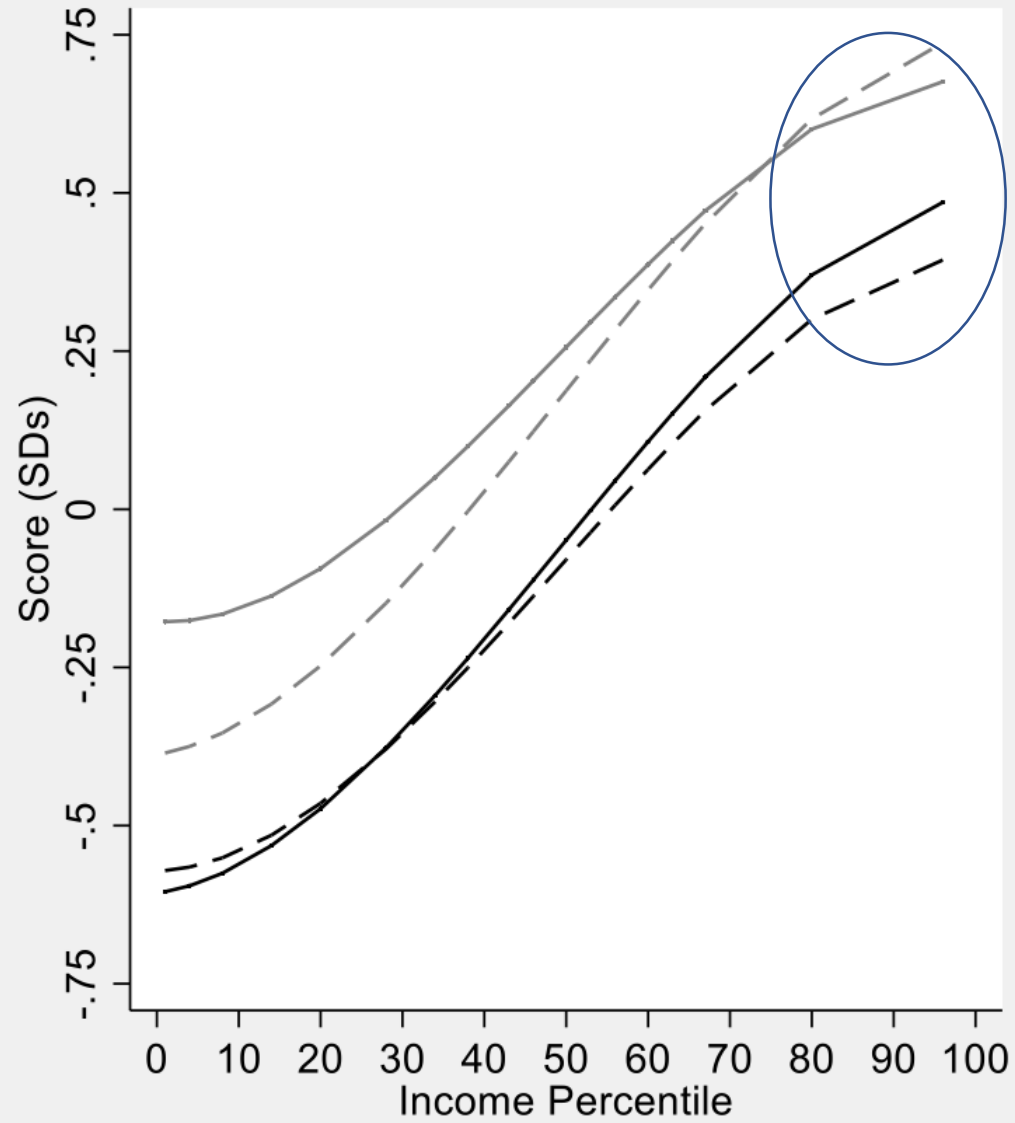
## Reading



— Black Girls    - - - - Black Boys    — White Girls    - - - - White Boys

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010-11 (ECLS-K:2011). Numbers of Observations: Math (9,100); Reading (9,200).

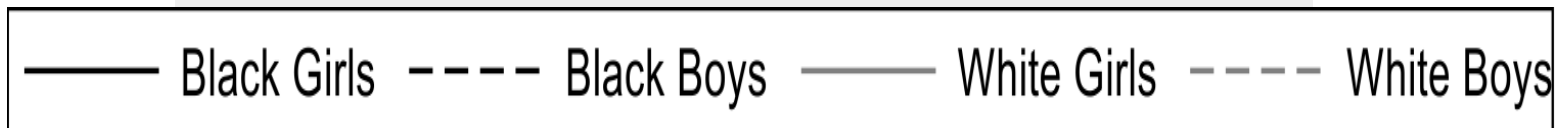
# Math



90<sup>th</sup> percentile, B-W math gaps

Boys: .33 SDs \*\*

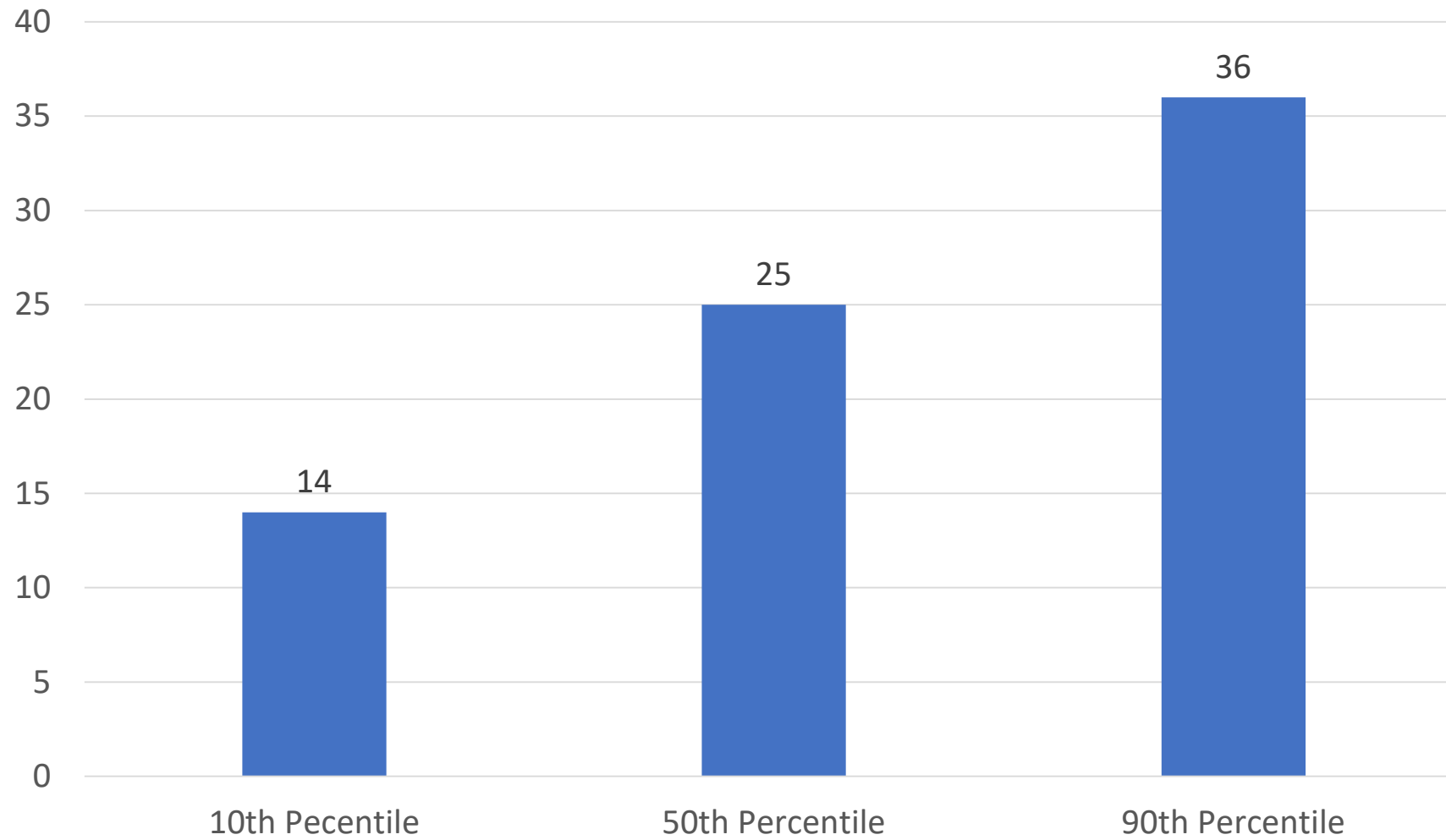
Girls .21 SDs \*



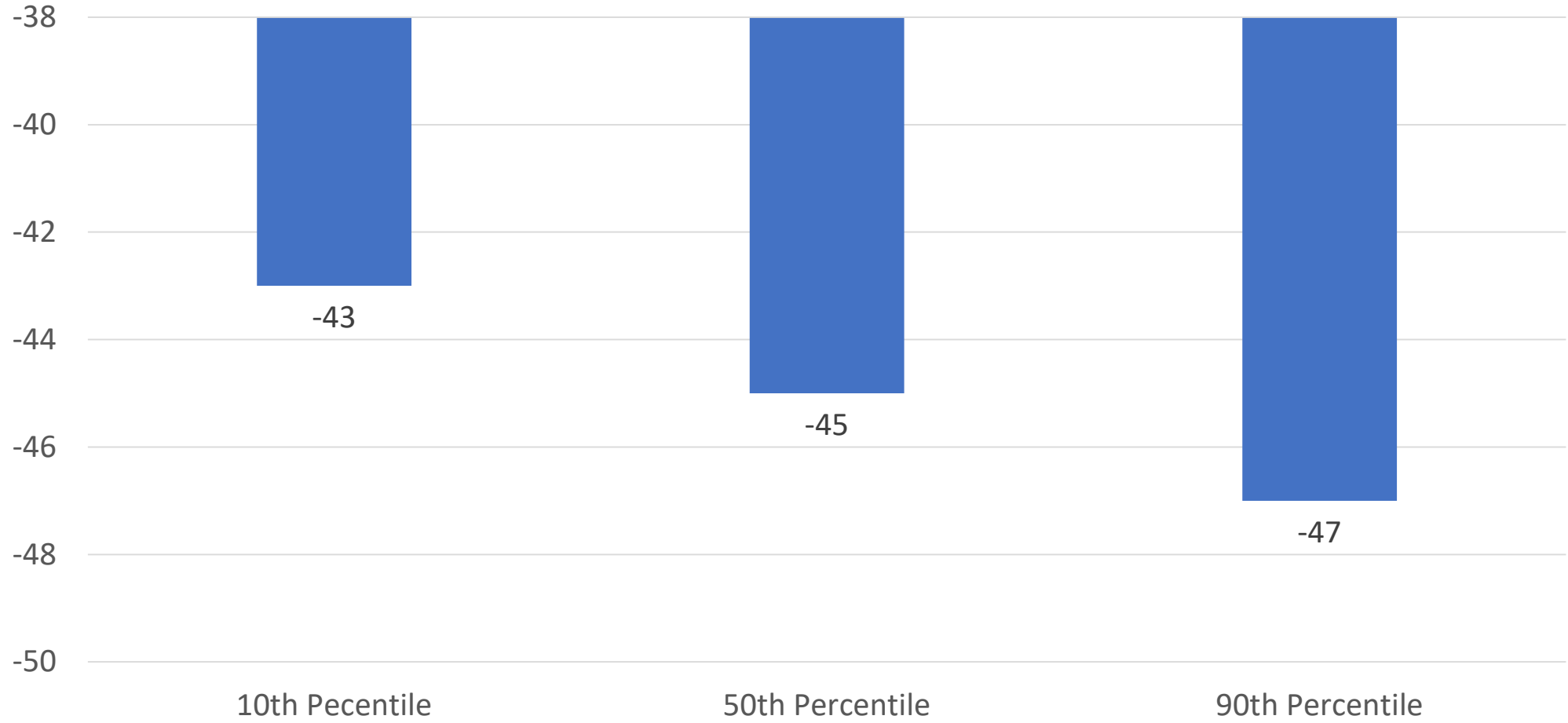
# Why do Black students begin school with worse academic readiness than same-income Whites?

- “Belief-behavior paradox”
  - Compared to same-income White families, Black families have:
    - Higher educational attainment expectations for their children and beliefs about skills for kindergarten, BUT
    - Lower educational resources and frequency of developmental activities
  - Demographics
    - Less likely to be two-parent households
    - Mothers work more hours

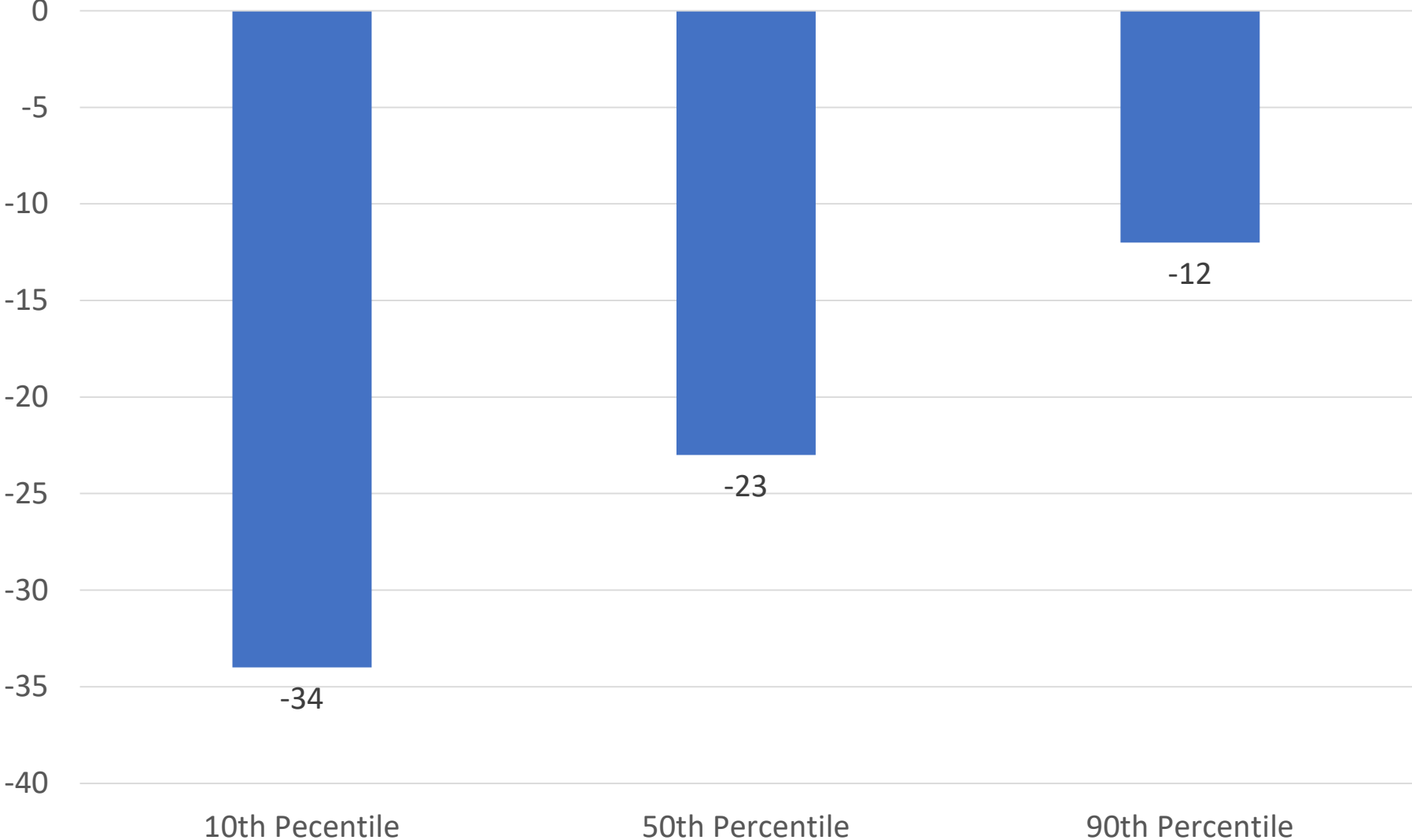
## Black-White Differences in % of Parents Who Expect Child to Attain PhD, MD, or Other Advanced Degree (Girls)



### Black-White Differences in # of Children's Books in the Household (Girls)



Black-White Differences in % of Two-Parent Households (Girls)



# Policy Implications

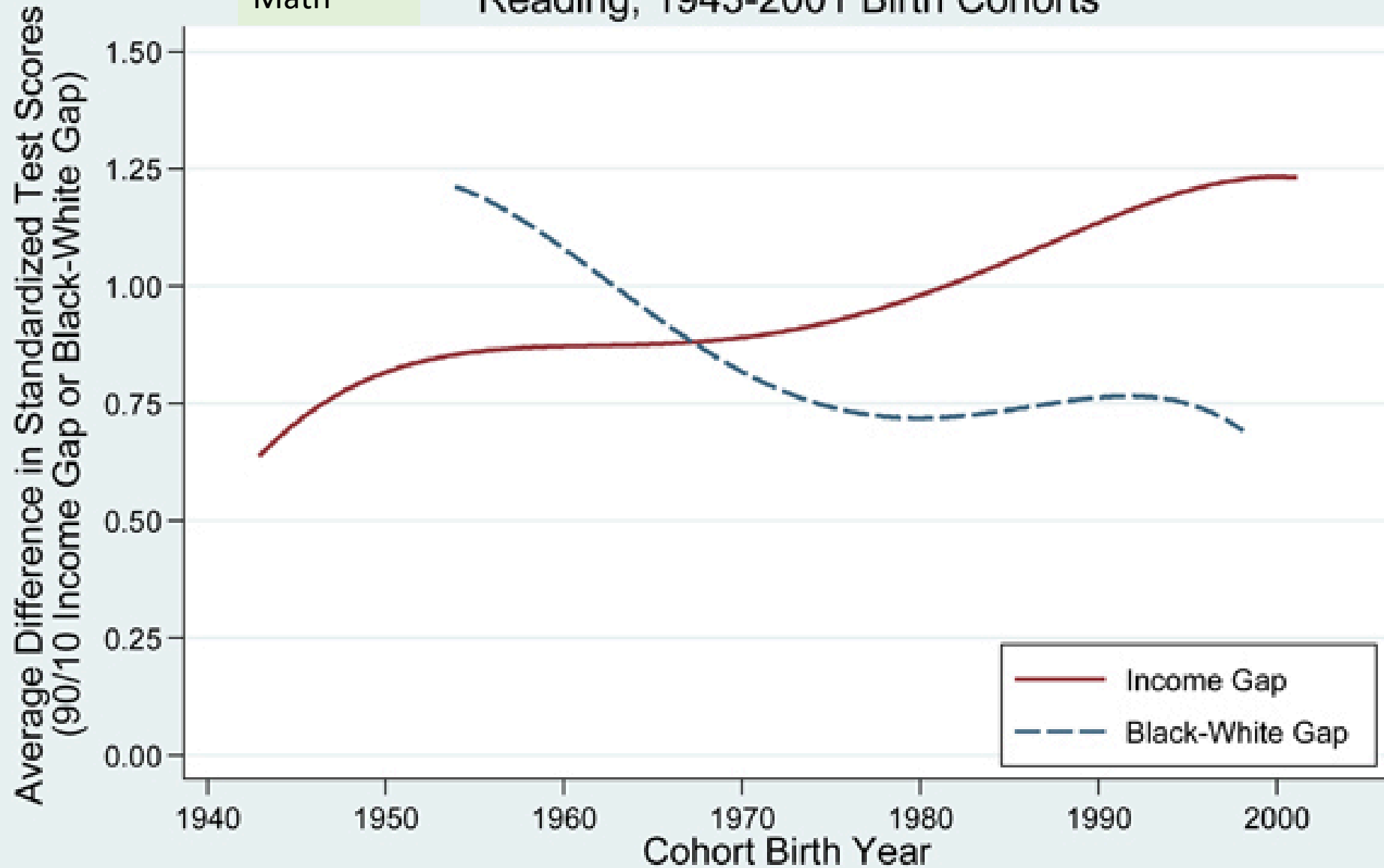
- Recommendations to reduce income gaps in school readiness
  - Whole-child programs
  - Direct resources to families, indirect resources from community (e.g., high-quality preschool)
  - “Mitigate poverty-related impediments to effective teaching and learning” (Garcia and Weiss 2017, Economic Policy Institute)
- Conceptualize disadvantage in an intersectional manner
  - *Low income*: Blacks disadvantaged relative to Whites in ways not expected based on income alone
  - *High income*: Blacks disadvantaged relative to Whites when not at all expected based on income alone
- Black’s strong educational beliefs provide clear evidence against cultural explanation for disconnect between beliefs and behaviors (or expectations and environment)
- Demographics and wealth



# Income Achievement Gap and Black-White Achievement Gap

Math

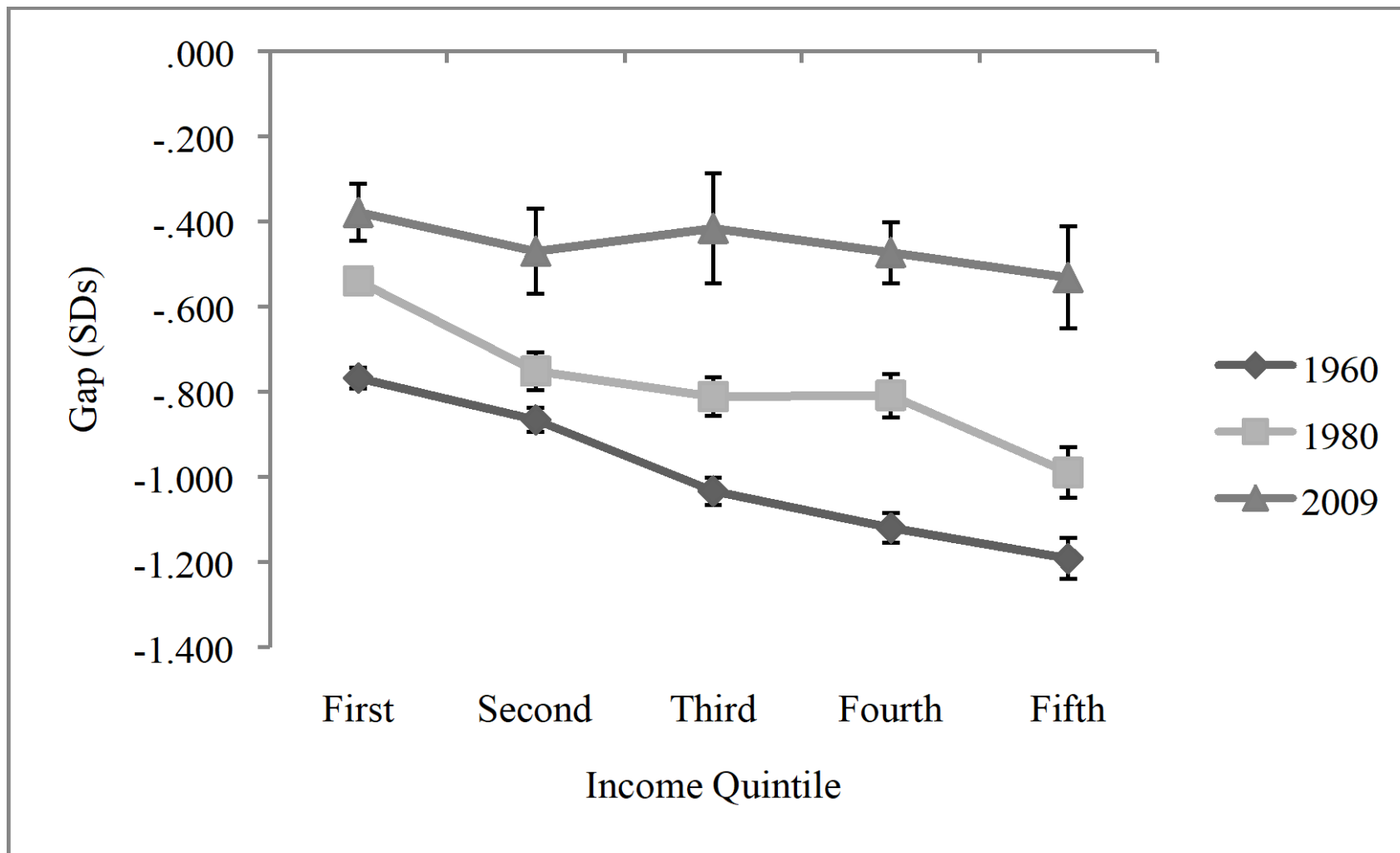
Reading, 1943-2001 Birth Cohorts



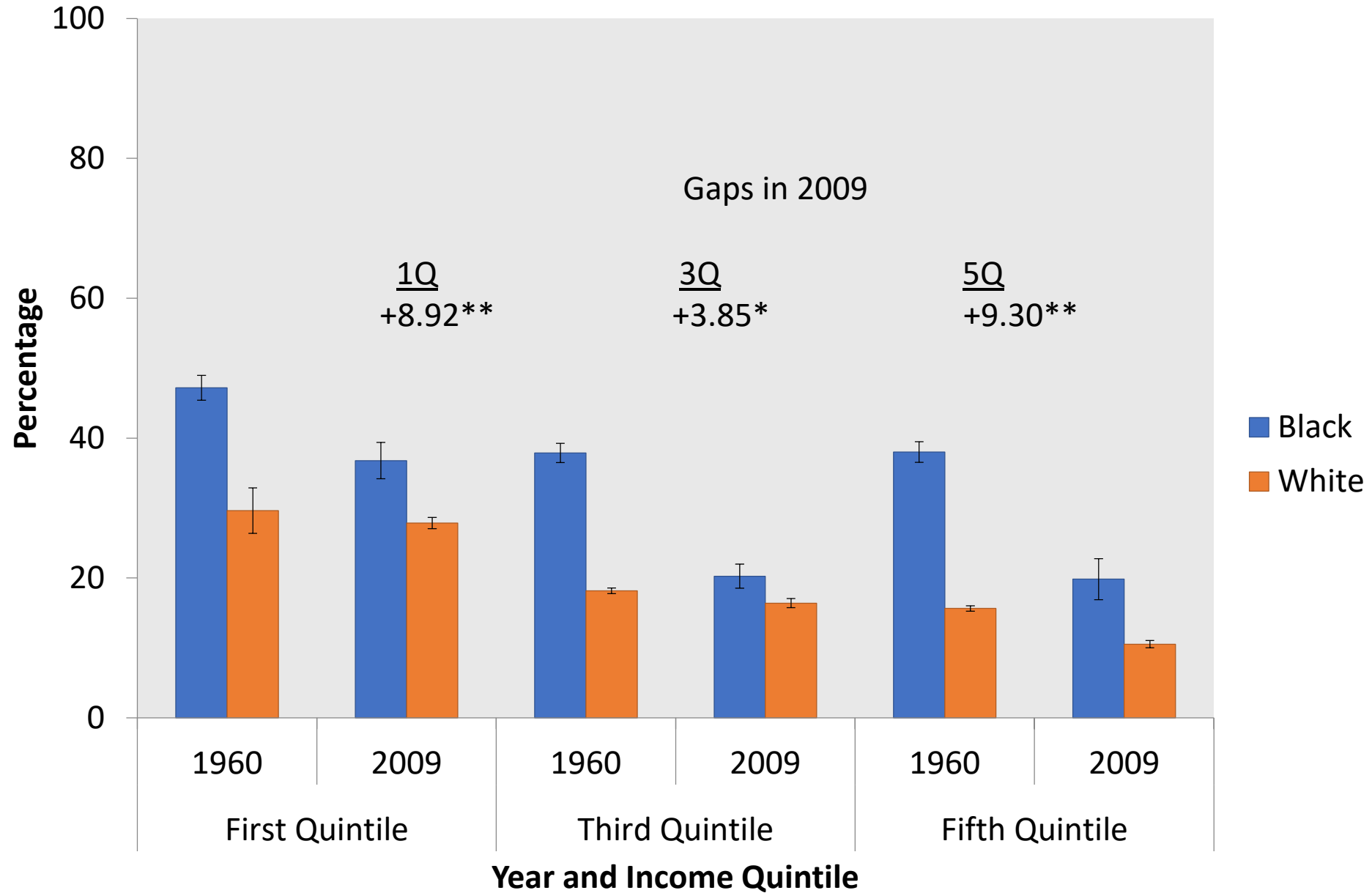
# Intersection of race and income trends

- At a given income level, have Black parents been as successful as White parents as translating their income into children's achievement?
- Why or why not?

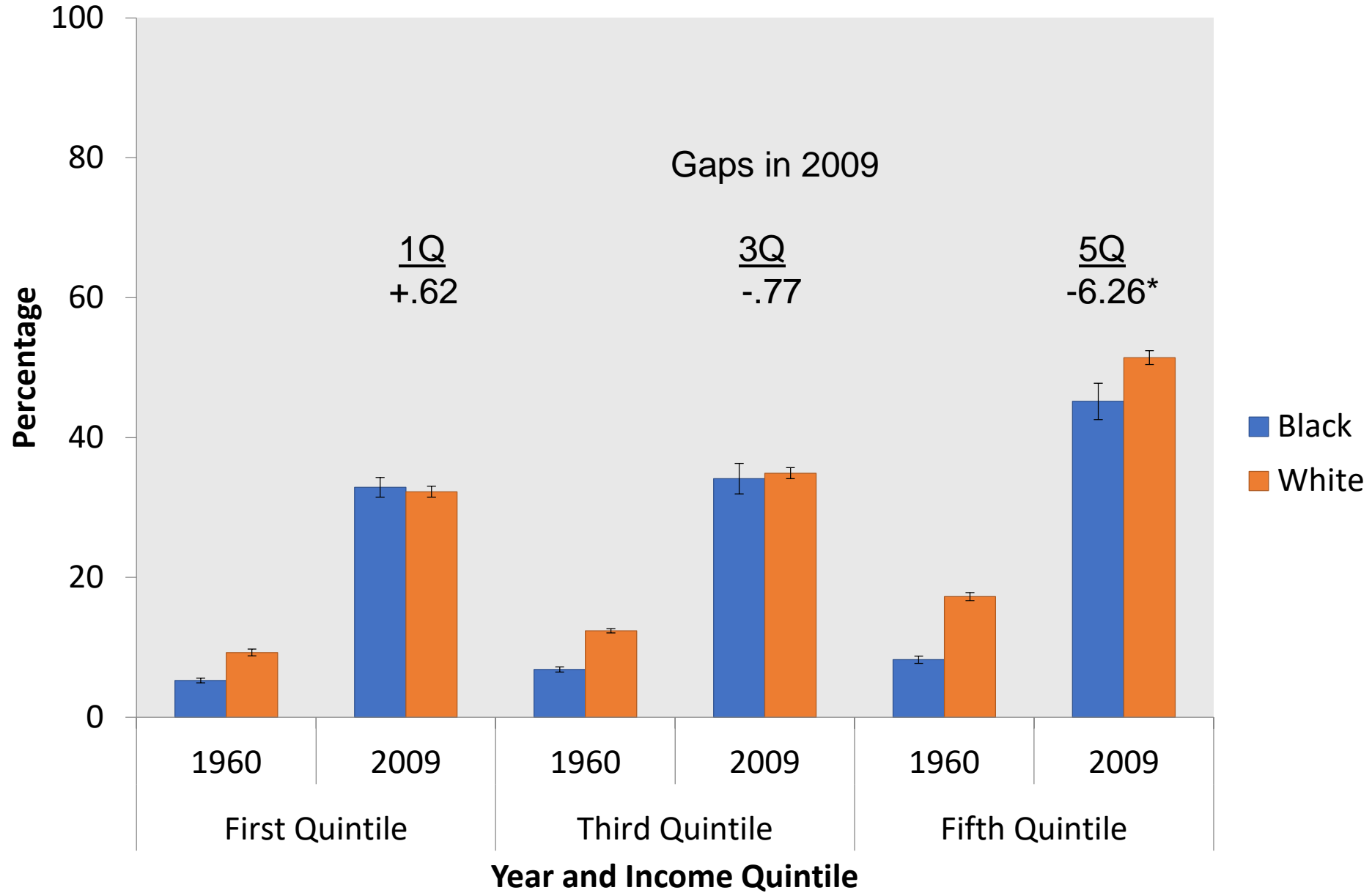
# Black-White Math Achievement Gaps Within Parental Income Quintiles, 1960-2009



# Percentage of Schoolmates From Households in First (Bottom) Income Quintile



# Percentage of Schoolmates From Households in Fifth (Top) Income Quintile



# Decomposition Results for School Composition (% of Gap Explained)

