

Lit Scan

Facts & Figures from the Colorado Literacy Research Initiative

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Maternal Education Outstrips Race & Ethnicity as Predictor of Kindergartners' Reading Achievement

Highlights

- While both maternal education and race/ethnicity exert strong effects on the reading achievement of kindergartners, maternal education has stronger effects.
- Regardless of race/ethnicity, children whose mothers graduated from high school or better were four times as likely to excel as readers as the children of high school dropouts.
- Regardless of maternal education, Hispanic and Black children were half as likely to excel as readers as White children.

In Fall 1998, first-time kindergartners were tested on reading as part of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the National Center for Education Statistics. The average reading scores of these children vary predictably based on mother's education and race/ethnicity. See Tables 1 and 2.

Clearly, the probability of a kindergartner scoring in the top quartile on reading is more powerfully affected by the child's mother's education than by race/ethnicity.

Almost half of children whose mothers earned a bachelor's or higher degree were in the top reading quartile. Fewer than one in 17 children whose mothers failed to complete high school excelled in reading.

Over one-third of Asian children and almost a third of White children scored in the top reading quartile. Hispanic and Black children were only half as likely to excel in reading.

Table 1. First-Time Kindergartners in Top Quartile of Reading Scores by Maternal Education, Fall 1998

Mother's education	Percent in top quartile
Less than high school	6
High school diploma or equivalent	16
Some college	26
Bachelor's degree or higher	46

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Table 2. First-Time Kindergartners in Top Quartile of Reading Scores by Race/Ethnicity, Fall 1998

Mother's education	Percent in top quartile
Asian	39
White	30
Hispanic	15
Black	15

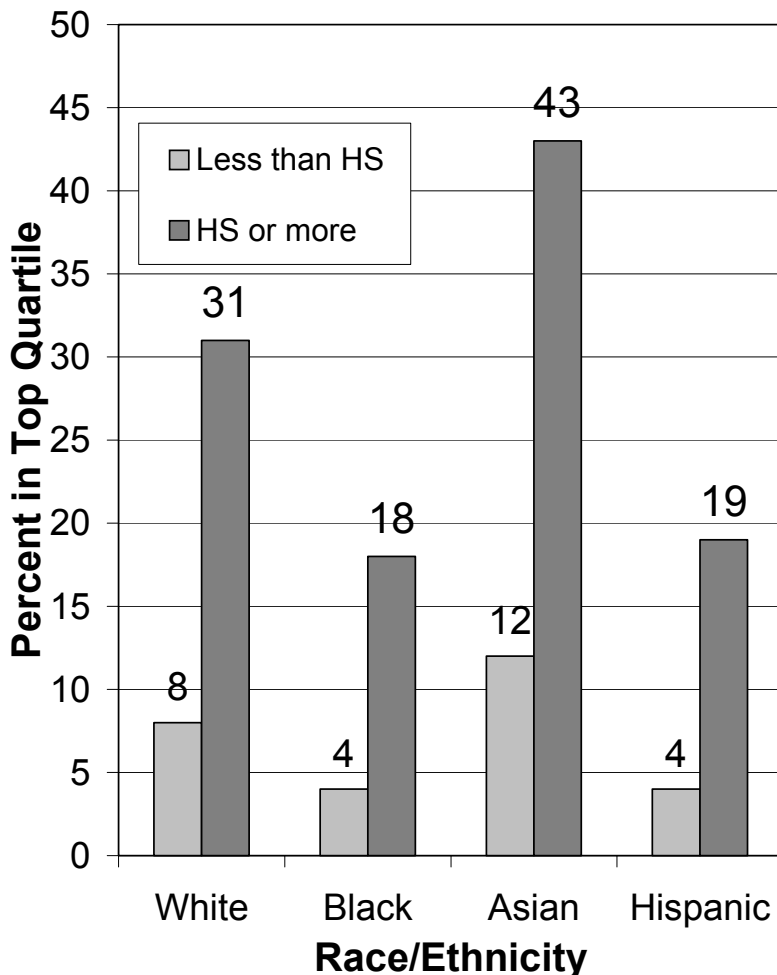
The relative strength of maternal education and race/ethnicity as predictors of kindergartners' reading achievement is even more clearly apparent when the scores are cross-tabulated by both variables. See chart below.

For each racial/ethnic group, the percentage of excellent readers quadruples if the child's mother has a high school diploma or equivalent. Notably, however, race/ethnicity still exerts some effect. The rankings of the racial/ethnic groups are the same within maternal education groups, even though the proportional differences are modest compared with those for maternal education.

SOURCE

- National Center for Education Statistics. **America's Kindergartners.** *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Class of 1998-99, Fall 1998. Statistical Analysis Report, February 2000.* Available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000070.pdf>

First-Time Kindergartners in Top Quartile of Reading Scores by Maternal Education and Race & Ethnicity, Fall 1998



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