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## EFP Takeaways

Long-Run Trends in the U.S. SES-Achievement Gap

### Background

Rising inequality in the United States has raised concerns about potentially widening gaps in educational achievement by children's household socioeconomic status (SES). Eric A. Hanushek, Jacob D. Light, Paul E. Peterson, Laura M. Talpey, and Ludger Woessmann use data from 4 high-quality testing series to explore trends in the SES achievement gap in the United States between 1961 and 2001. Their work is published in vol. 17 issue 4 of *EFP*.

### The Study

To explore the long-term trends in the SES-achievement gap, the authors look at data from 4 longitudinal testing regimes—LTT-NAEP, Main-NAEP, TIMSS, and PISA. For more than one and a half million students, the authors construct an index of household SES based on information about parental education and home possessions. The sample includes 93 distinct test-subject-age-year combinations.

#### For more details:

- View the [full issue](#).
- See the [full article in \*Education Finance and Policy\*](#).
- [Sign up here to receive future \*EFP Takeaways\*](#).
- Summary of:  
Hanushek, E., Light, J., Peterson, P., Talpey, L., & Woessmann, L. (2022) Long-Run Trends in the U.S. SES-Achievement Gap. *Education Finance and Policy*, 17 (4): 608-640.

### Findings

The authors find that SES achievement gaps have slowly closed over the past four decades—by 0.05 standard deviations per decade between 1961 and 2001. Figure 2 shows trends for specific testing series. The speed at which gaps are closing is so slow, however, that if current trends continue it will still take almost all of this century to cut the gaps in half.

The authors conclude that compensatory programs aimed at dealing with the achievement challenges of disadvantaged students have been unable to fulfill the promises of the War on Poverty.

**Figure 2.** Achievement Gaps Between Top and Bottom Quartiles of the Socioeconomic Status (SES) Distribution, by Test Regime

