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Socioeconomic Gaps in Early Childhood Experiences, 1998 to 2010

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Using two nationally-representative datasets, this study compares early life experiences of kindergarteners in 1998 and 2010. We find that young children in the later period are exposed to more books and reading in the home, they have more access to educational games on computers, and they engage with their parents more, both inside and outside the home. Although these increases occurred among both low and high-income children, in many cases the biggest changes were seen among the lowest income children. Our results indicate a narrowing but still large early childhood parental investment gaps. In addition, socioeconomic gaps in preschool participation grew over this period, despite substantial investments in public preschool. Implications for early socioeconomic achievement gaps are discussed.

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