



NCCP National Center for
Children in Poverty
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Early Learning & Low-Income Children: Lessons from Research

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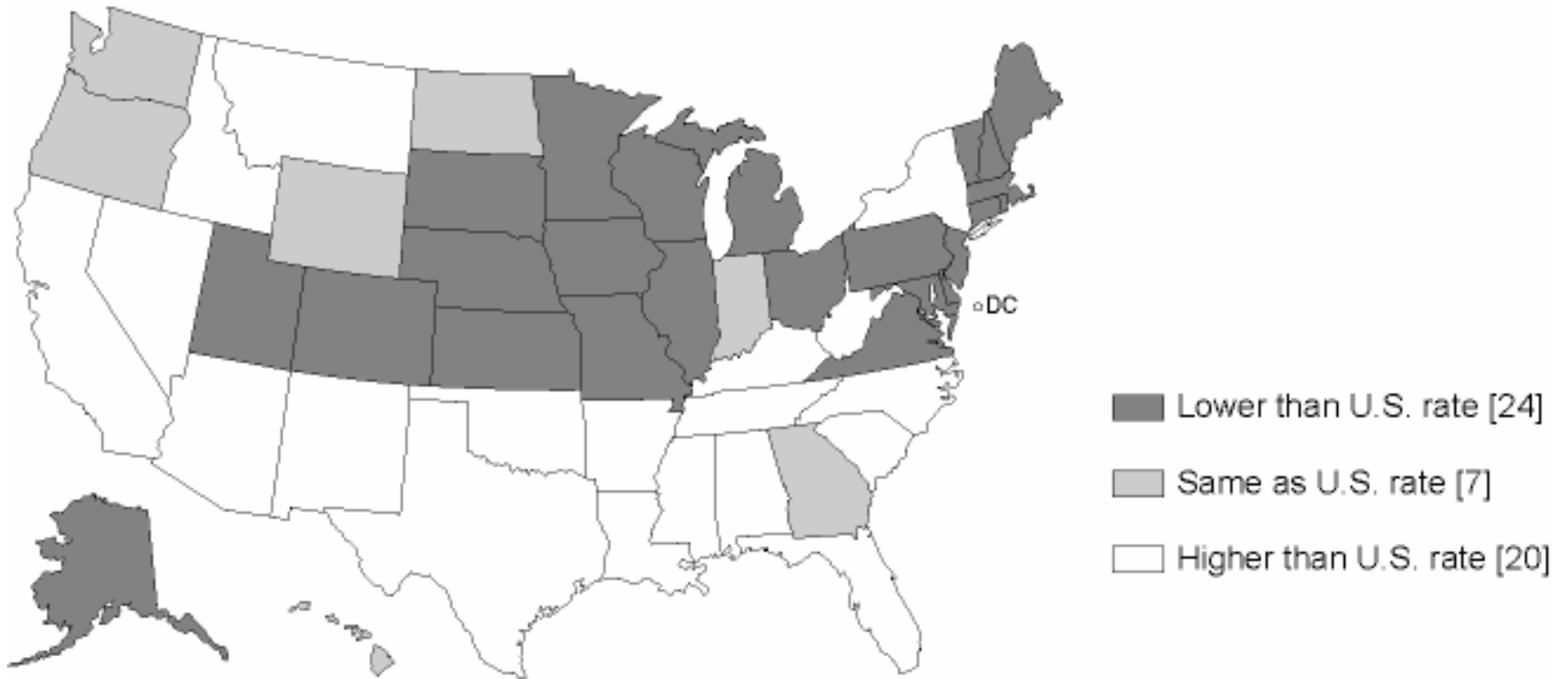
The Questions

- Who are low-income children?
- What does research tell us about early learning, development and achievement in low-income children?
- What are the practice and policy implications?

What Does It Mean to be Low-Income?

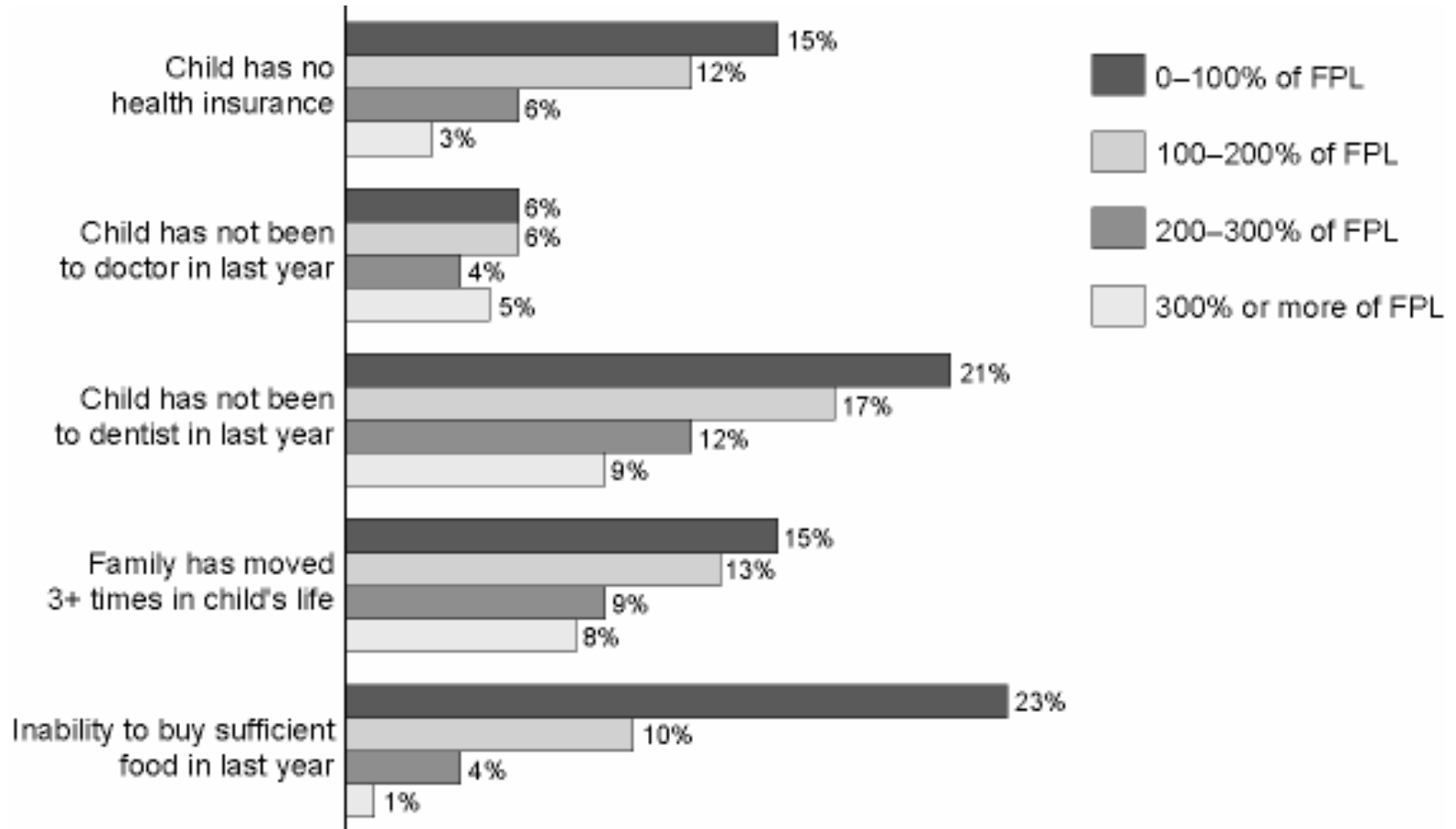
- On average, families need at least two times the federal poverty level (FPL) to be able to meet basic necessities (about \$37,000 for a family of four).
- 37% (26 million) children live in families with incomes at at or below 200%FPL.
- Rates vary by place, race, immigrant status and state.
- Hardship is common.

Children in Low-Income Families



The map shows differences between states and the U.S. rate that are statistically significant at the .10 level.

Experiences of Hardship Within Income Groups



Who are Low-Income Children?

- The younger the children, the more likely they are to be in low-income families.
 - **42% of infants and toddlers (4.8m)**
 - **40% of preschoolers (3.2m)**
 - 38% of school-aged children (10.5m)
 - 32% of adolescents (6.2m)
- Children of color are at least twice as likely to be in low-income families.

Early Learning: The Research Story

Three types of research:

- Research on development & early learning
- Research on the achievement gap
- Emerging research on strategies to improve early achievement

Research on Early Learning and Development

- The earliest relationships set the stage for healthy development and learning.
- Both early literacy skills and social and emotional skills are necessary.
- **Most children, including low-income children are “eager to learn” and have the cognitive & social & emotional skills to succeed.**

Research on Achievement Gap in Kindergarten

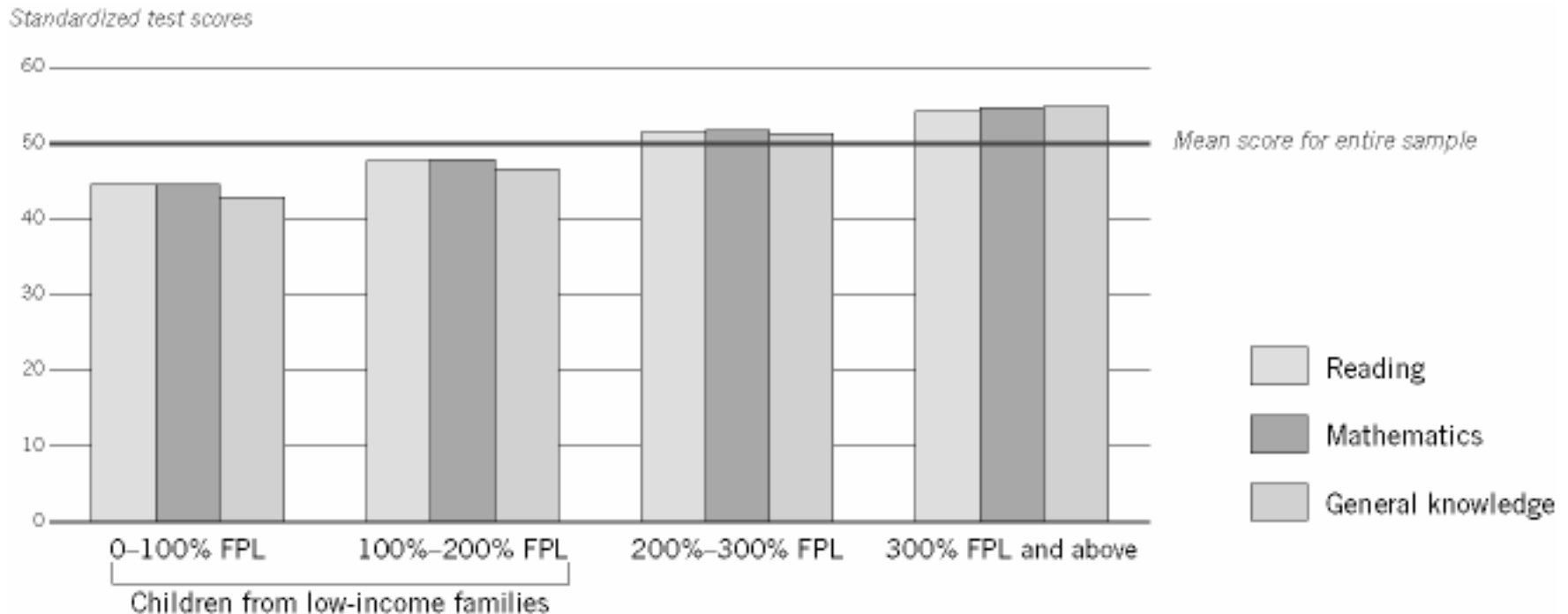
In kindergarten, in general, the lower the income:

- The lower the children's academic achievement.
- The lower the children's social skills.
- The greater the reports of children's emotional and behavioral problems.

Source: E. Gershoff. *Low Income and the Development of America's Kindergartners*. See NCCP website.

Kindergarten Achievement by Income

Average Reading, Math, and General Knowledge Standardized Test Scores Within Income-to-Needs Groups, 1998



Why the Achievement Gap

Young low-income children are “eager to learn”

BUT

- They face more barriers/risks than non-poor children.
- The more risk factors/barriers the higher the odds of early school failure.
- Early school failure predicts later school failure.
- The gap starts early.

Factors Related to Early School Failure

- Poverty and low-income status
- Low-quality early care and learning experiences
- Low-quality schools
- Demographic & psychosocial family factors (e.g.) Low maternal education, sa, dv & depression

Early Learning: The View from the Ground

- Early childhood community concerns
 - Too many children who seem “mad” “bad” & “sad”, being “kicked out”
 - Too many families are too stressed
 - Too many child care providers and teachers lack skills
- Kindergarten teacher concerns
 - Children who can’t follow directions, relate to others, listen to teachers
- Both: Pressures on young children (no naps, recess; high stakes testing)

Pathways to Early Learning Success

- Help parents as *providers*, as *teachers*, and for some, as *nurturers*.
- Strengthen the skills/requirements of caregivers & teachers as *nurturers* and *educators*

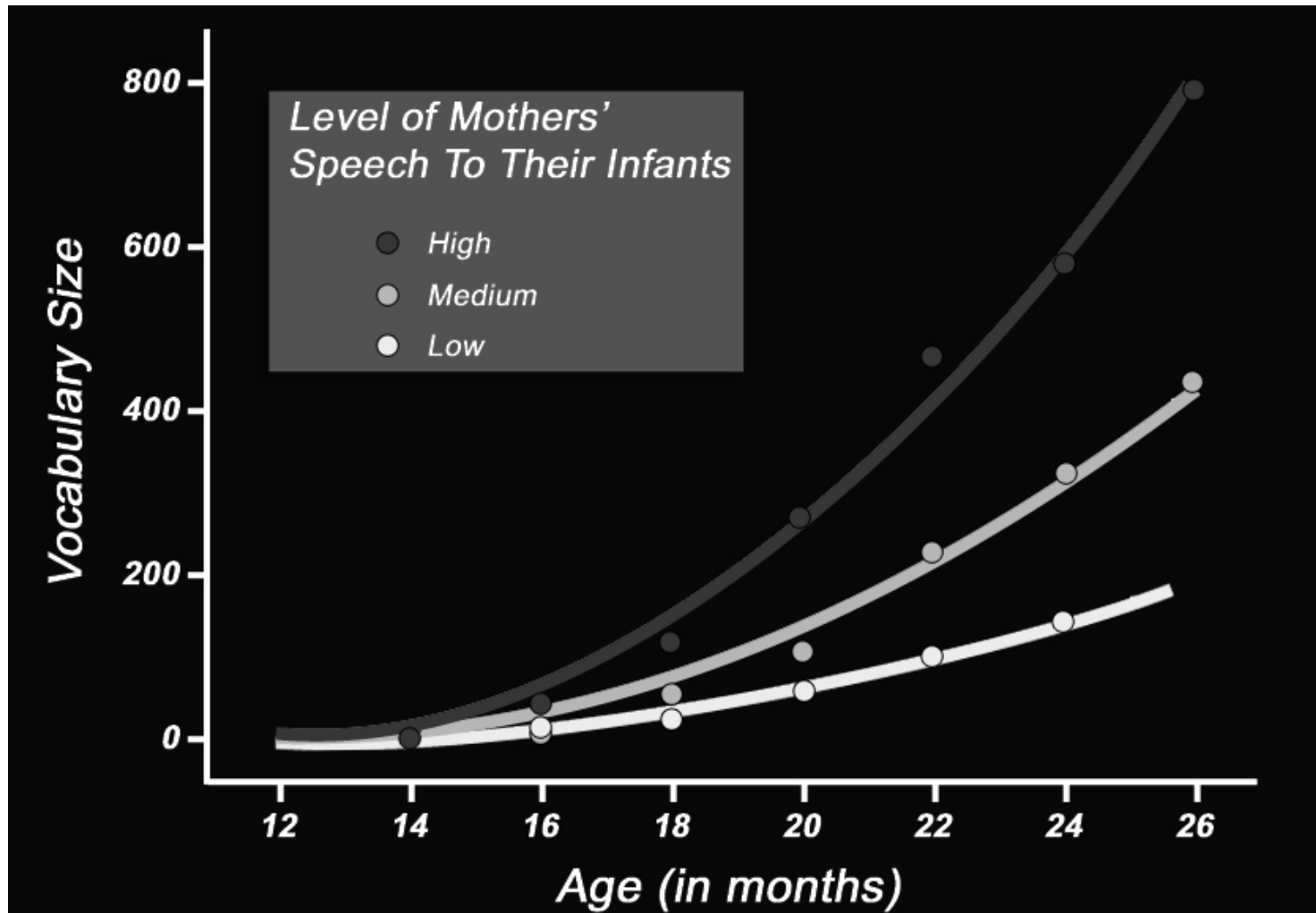
Pathways to Early Learning Success: Policy & Practice Implications

- Build program, community and state strategies to:
 - Promote family economic security
 - **Ensure all low-income children have access to high quality early care AND education**
 - Develop intentional strategies to address the multiple risk factors facing a subset of low-income children and families
- Start early

Investing in Early Learning; Infants & Toddlers

- **Early Head Start**
 - serves 68,00 children (2.2 million in poverty)
 - Pattern positive findings, linked to quality of implementation
- **Quality early child care**
 - low-income children least likely to be in center-based care
- **Relationship-based early language and literacy strategies (Mother Read, Father Read; Reach Out and Read)**

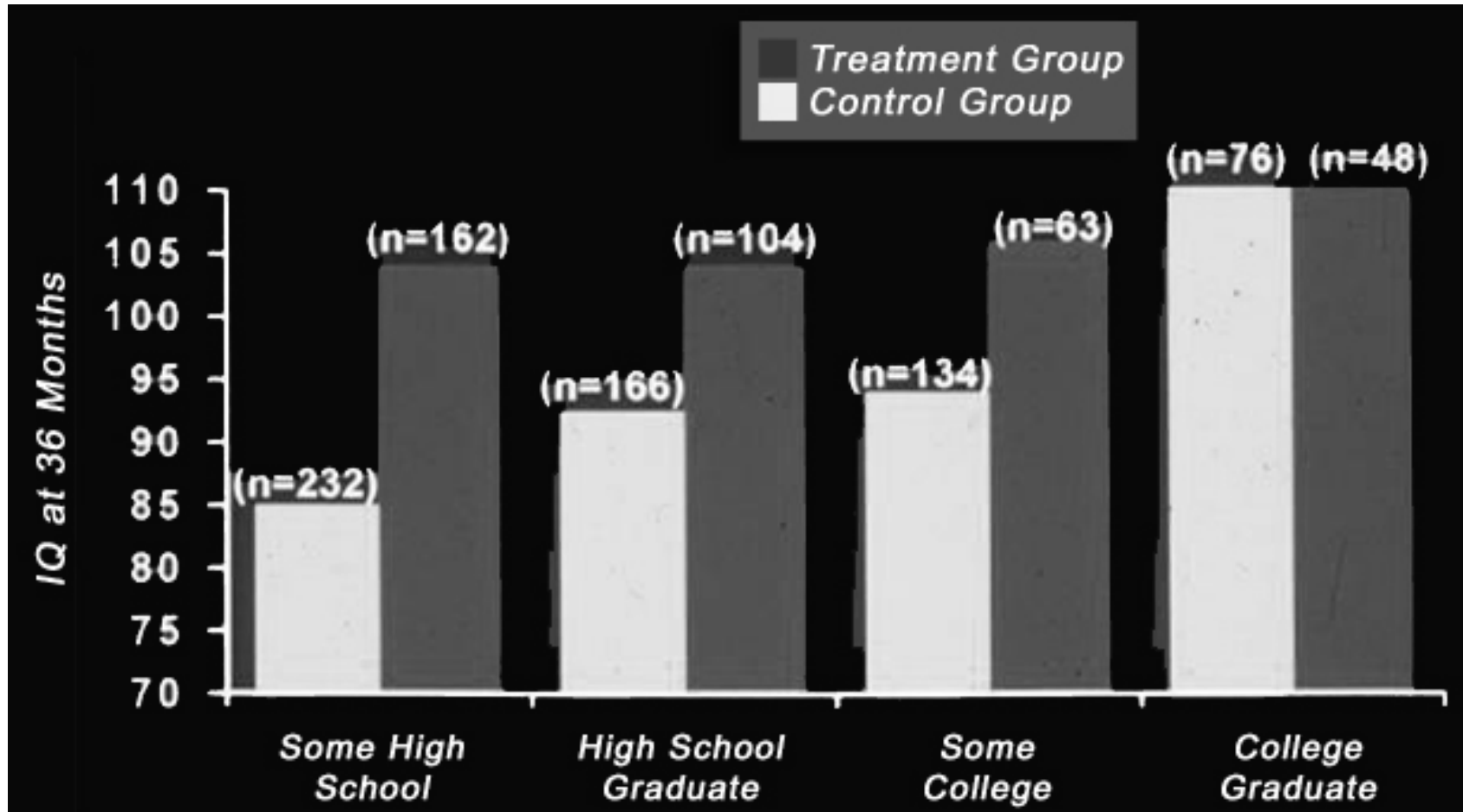
Effects of Mothers' Speech on Infant Vocabulary



Huttenlocher et al. (1991). *Developmental Psychology*.

Infant Health and Development Program

Maternal Education X Treatment Group



Ramey & Ramey. (1998). *Preventive Medicine*.

Investing in Targeted Early Learning Strategies

- Emerging organized learning strategies/curricula
- Strategies to help child care care providers and teachers implement best early educational practices
- Culturally responsive strategies to reduce the distance between school & family

Investing in Targeted Early Learning Supports

Early Learning Supports

- *Classroom-focused*
 - Tools of the Mind; Positive Behavioral Supports
- *Intensive Family-focused*
 - P.E.A.C.E. (EHS) RIP/EIC); infant-parent therapies; CUPS

Conclusions

To promote school readiness for low-income children and families:

- Start with infancy and before
- Pay attention to income
- Recognize that low-income children need special practice & policy attention
- Engage in community fiscal planning to pay for early learning supports
- Track outcomes to guide investments

If you would like more information,
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Or visit the NCCP web site
www.nccp.org