CHILD DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Conclusions

What has been reported in this paper has been an exercise in systems analysis. The problem addressed, which has an extensive literature, is the variability in the readiness of five-year-olds for school. While the analysis is theoretical in nature—a kind of thought experiment—it is generally consistent with the literature on school readiness and early childhood development and yet, at the same time emphasizes the weaknesses in the current knowledge base. Most of the research available on the development of readiness for school is correlational in nature. What is needed— although it is difficult to do—is bivariate experimental research that would provide the effect sizes that are needed for more precise systemic analysis.

My overarching conclusion from thinking deeply about the "achievement gap" over the past several years, and looking systematically at the dynamics of both schooling and early childhood development, is not optimistic. The policies that work in schools to improve the achievement of initially low-readiness children work also to improve the achievement of initially average- and high-readiness students. This is not to say that we should not invest in "good schools"—strong school leadership, high quality teachers, rigorous curricula, and all the other factors that characterize "good schools." Bringing initially low-readiness students closer to national academic achievement norms, even if other students do even better, is a virtuous effort.

At the level of early childhood development, as the analytic work reported in this paper suggest, implementing policies to close the "readiness gap" is costly, imperfect, and probably politically difficult. As was said by James Boutin, and reported in a blog by Valerie Strauss (*Washington Post*, December 24, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/12/24/we-are-trying-to-close-the-achievement-gap-all-wrong-teacher/) about a typical disadvantaged student used as an example:

> Getting to and from school was not the only challenge Guillermo faced, though. His father abandoned his mother and siblings when he was 4 years old after some years of verbal and physical abuse, and his mom could not get a regular housing situation on her own. Although I didn't learn about these facts until after he'd left my classroom, it made a lot of sense. Guillermo was a student who had suffered the loss and abuse of his father, and the financial instability of his mother. On top of that, he struggled with the same challenges that teenagers who don't face such tremendous trauma deal with on a daily basis: hormonal changes, fitting in at school, and finding an identity.

As Michael Rebell, Campaign for Educational Equity, Teachers College, Columbia University, argued, as quoted in Layton's *Washington Post* article (*op. cit.*):

> "We have to think about how to give these kids a meaningful education," he said. "We have to give them quality teachers, small class sizes, up-to-date equipment. But in addition, if we're serious, we have to do things that overcome the damages- of poverty. We have to meet their health needs, their

mental health needs, after-school programs, summer programs, parent engagement, early-childhood services. These are the so-called wraparound services. Some people think of them as add-ons. They're not. They're imperative."

No, it's not easy and there's more to the problem than closing the school-readiness gap and the academic achievement gap, *per se*. There's also the larger task of closing the "life gap," the dramatic difference in standards of living that characterize families with different educational backgrounds and incomes—which goes well beyond scores on a limited range of high-stakes tests.