

Whether an early achieving African American boy stays on course depends on parenting.

Preschool-to-Kindergarten Transition Patterns for African American Boys

Four distinct patterns define the transition of African American boys from preschool to kindergarten, revealing the importance of parenting and other factors on their academic and social performance across this time of change.

The move from preschool to kindergarten can be challenging for many children due to new expectations, social interactions, and physiological changes. Transitions may be even more arduous for African American boys, given that some teachers may view their behaviors negatively and assume that the boys are deficient intellectually; yet, previous research has demonstrated that many African American boys transition into kindergarten prepared to learn and excel. In the early years, African American children, including boys, produce narratives of higher quality and have greater narrative comprehension than their peers—and, controlling for family income—African American boys outperform other boys.

Method

Many studies have only focused on the academic or social deficits of African American boys after entering kindergarten. This study looked at a full range of experiences and outcomes, studying the transitions of 700 African American boys, focusing on family and child characteristics, as well as on parenting practices. Two questions guided the research:

- (1) What are the academic and social skill patterns of African American boys as they transition from preschool through kindergarten?
- (2) Do socioeconomic status, parenting, and preschool attendance predict the likelihood of being in a particular transition pattern?

To answer these questions, researchers measured children's cognitive and socio-emotional development through direct assessments, and parents provided information through computer-assisted personal interviews and self-administered questionnaires. Childcare providers and teachers completed self-administered questionnaires about children's socio-emotional development at preschool and kindergarten.



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Four Patterns and the Factors Influencing Transition Outcomes

The study found four patterns for African American boys after they transitioned:

- 1) Increasing Academically.** Just over half the boys (51%) showed significant academic gains, evidenced by their language, reading, and math scores in kindergarten.
- 2) Low Achiever: Declining Academically.** A sizeable group (19%) consisted of low achievers in preschool whose academic scores fell even further after transition.
- 3) Early Achiever: Declining Academically and Socially.** The smallest group (11%) included early achievers who declined both academically and behaviorally in kindergarten.
- 4) Consistent Early Achiever.** In contrast to #3, 20% of the boys in the study comprised a group of early achievers who remained on their high-performing academic and social paths after the transition.

The results show that some African American boys experience challenges to their academic achievement and social skills as they move into kindergarten. In addition, a look at the two groups of early achievers is especially revealing about the importance of effective parenting. The African American boys from homes where mothers frequently engaged in literacy activities and intentional teaching—and other activities like playing games and taking the

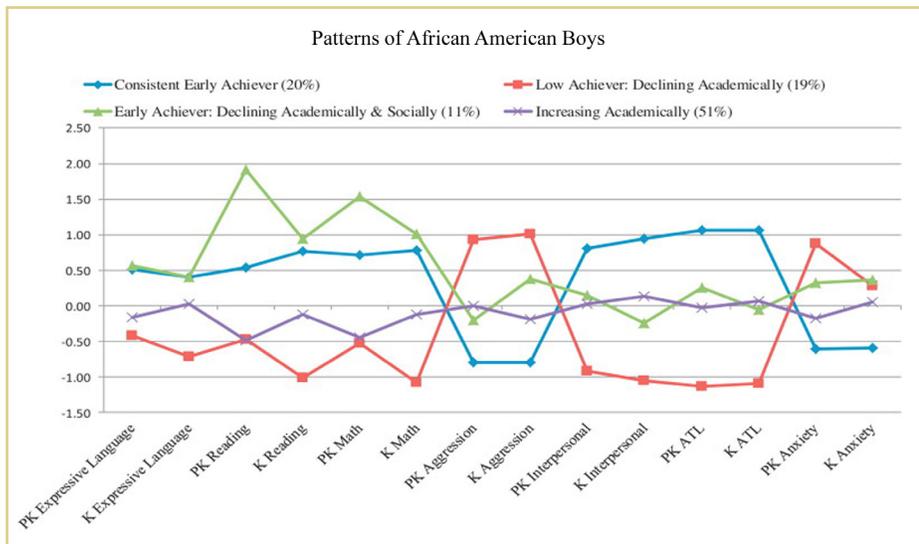
achievers who declined academically and socially were more likely to be from homes in which the parents were inattentive. This group of boys with detached parents showed a significant decrease in their reading and math scores and an increase in aggression during the preschool-to-kindergarten transition.

Findings also indicate that family socioeconomic status and attendance in center-based programs are associated with the probability of being in a particular pattern. Socioeconomic status (as denoted by family income-to-needs ratio and maternal education) predicts the likelihood of being in the early achiever groups, which is consistent with prior research indicating the positive impact of family income and maternal education.

The study also found that attendance in center-based programs showed inconsistent outcomes for African American boys during the transition. While, in some cases, attendance in center-based programs may promote boys' social skills—especially those with low academic skills—attendance in center-based programs may also inhibit achievement and self-regulation for early achievers.

The results from this study confirm the importance of responsive parenting that is enriching and cognitively stimulating. Because of the importance of parenting, the authors recommend involving parents in academic and social support for children throughout this time of change.

Programs such as Head Start have found the largest impact for African American children, possibly due to Head Start's focus on parenting processes, as well as quality early care and education programming for children. Thus, family support and early education programs can have a benefit in supporting the early development and transition of African American boys, who are often at risk of special education placement, grade retention, school dropout, and incarceration.



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child on errands—were likely to be in the high achieving groups.

While this finding provides additional confirmation of the importance of literacy and language activities for young children's development, whether an early achieving African American boy stays on course depends on parent-child interactions, too. The early

Full Study

Iruka, I. U., Gardner-Neblett, N., Matthews, J. S., & Winn, D-M. C. (2014). Preschool to kindergarten transition patterns for African American boys. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, (29)2, 106-117. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.11.004>



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