

# Behavioral barriers to success in education

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## Valorization Addedum

This dissertation investigates the role of aspirations and beliefs in explaining children's educational outcomes, and explores how they can exacerbate socioeconomic disadvantage in education. Apart from the academic contribution of highlighting the importance of internal constraints in educational outcomes, the findings of this dissertation are also directly useful for policy making.

Chapter 1 proposes an easily-implementable methodology to estimate the potential size of aspirational poverty traps in a given population, and applies this methodology to the United States to show that 5.5 to 7% of the population could be located in aspirational poverty traps. This important result indicates that social interventions and welfare programs lifting aspirations could have a high potential for reducing achievement gap.

Chapter 2 shows that policy uncertainty about student finance can alone create or exacerbate achievement gaps as early as upon entering middle school. This finding highlights i) that access to higher education could be improved by reducing uncertainty in student finance, and ii) that uncertainty about future policies can harm vulnerable populations, exacerbating inequality of opportunity.

Chapter 3 indicates that high-achieving peers not only improve test scores, but also make children pay exert less school effort but increases their aspiration to go to university, and increase the time they spend with their parents. This study also finds that peer effects in test scores are not explained by intermediate effects on students' effort, aspirations and parental time investments. Together, these findings suggest that educational policies manipulating peer assignment - such as tracking, school admission policies, or classroom assignment policies - can in principle be leveraged to reduce achievement gaps, while increasing students' aspirations.

Chapter 4 shows that *i)* teachers rely on imperfect signals about children's ability, and form systematically biased expectations about their potential, *ii)* teacher bias can disadvantage migrant children, and *iii)* has long-lasting consequences on STEM major choice in high school. Suggestive findings also indicate that teacher bias can be limited through admissions policies in which teacher assessments have little weight. This study overall indicates that eliminating teacher bias should be a priority for education policies and explores the scope of two educational policies to this end.