



# Exploring the Mechanism Underlying the Effects of Family Income on Students' Educational Expectations

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# Income-Achievement Gap

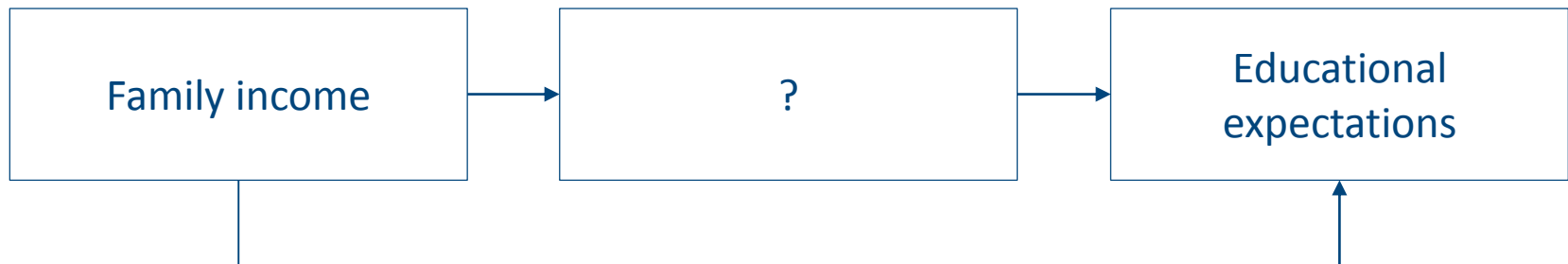
- Children from underprivileged families are less likely to succeed at school and attend a university
- Drop out rates among low-income university students are extremely high
- It results in low social mobility and reproduction of inequality

# Income-achievement gap: Explanations

- The disparity in the access to resources: economic, social, cultural capital (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Duncan, 2012)
- Attitudes, beliefs and expectations of parents (e.g. low importance of education) that affect children through parents' behaviors (e.g., Lewis, 1979)
- Lower levels of cognitive development of kids from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., Evans & Fuller-Rowell, 2013)
- Lower educational aspirations and expectations of the low-income kids (e.g., Kirk et al., 2012)

# What today's talk is about

- The focus is on the link between family income children's educational expectations and the mechanism underlying this link



# Why expectations are important?

This knowledge can provide us with more opportunities to:

- Develop strategies to empower low-income students
- Facilitate social mobility
- Design solutions to break the cycle of poverty

# What do we know so far?

Expectations form as a result of children's experiences in different life contexts, primarily family and school (e.g., Smyth, 2018)

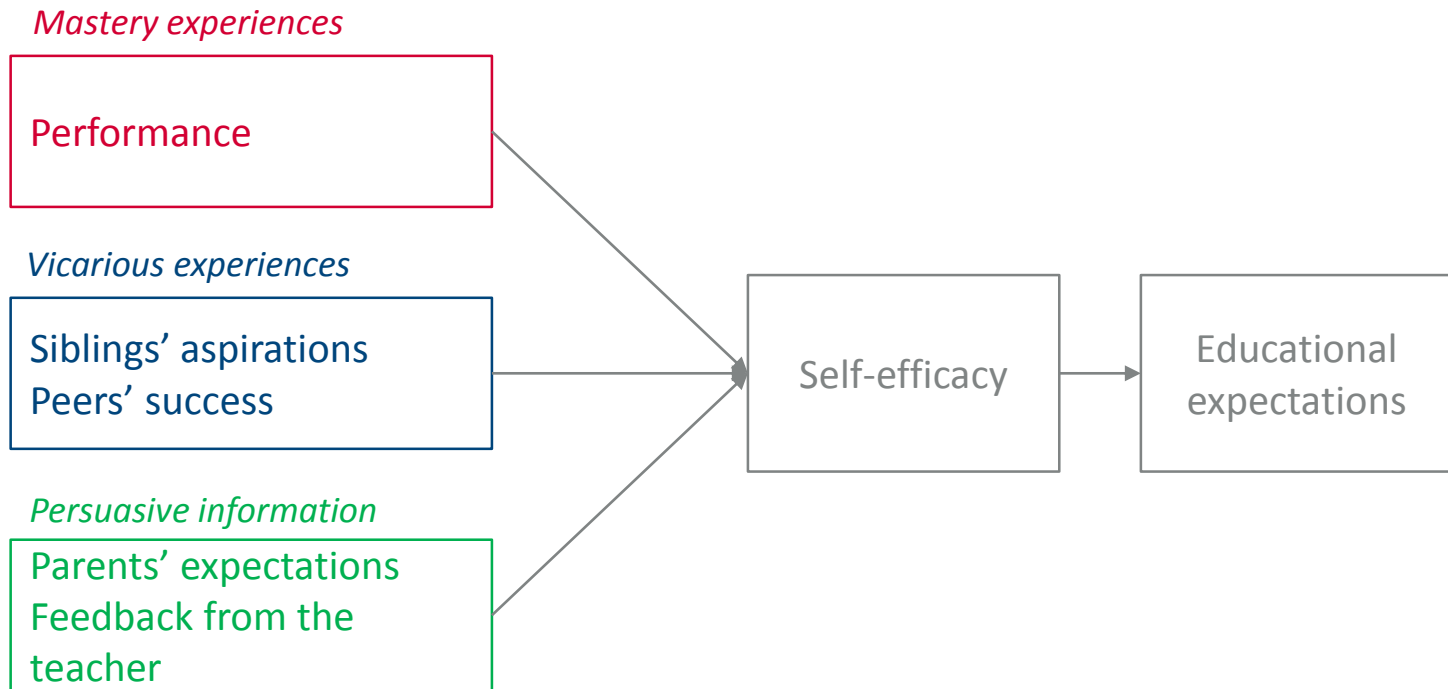
Important factors are:

- Parental aspirations and expectations regarding their children's achievement
- Siblings' aspirations
- Students' own performance
- Teachers' feedback and assessment
- Peers' performance and success

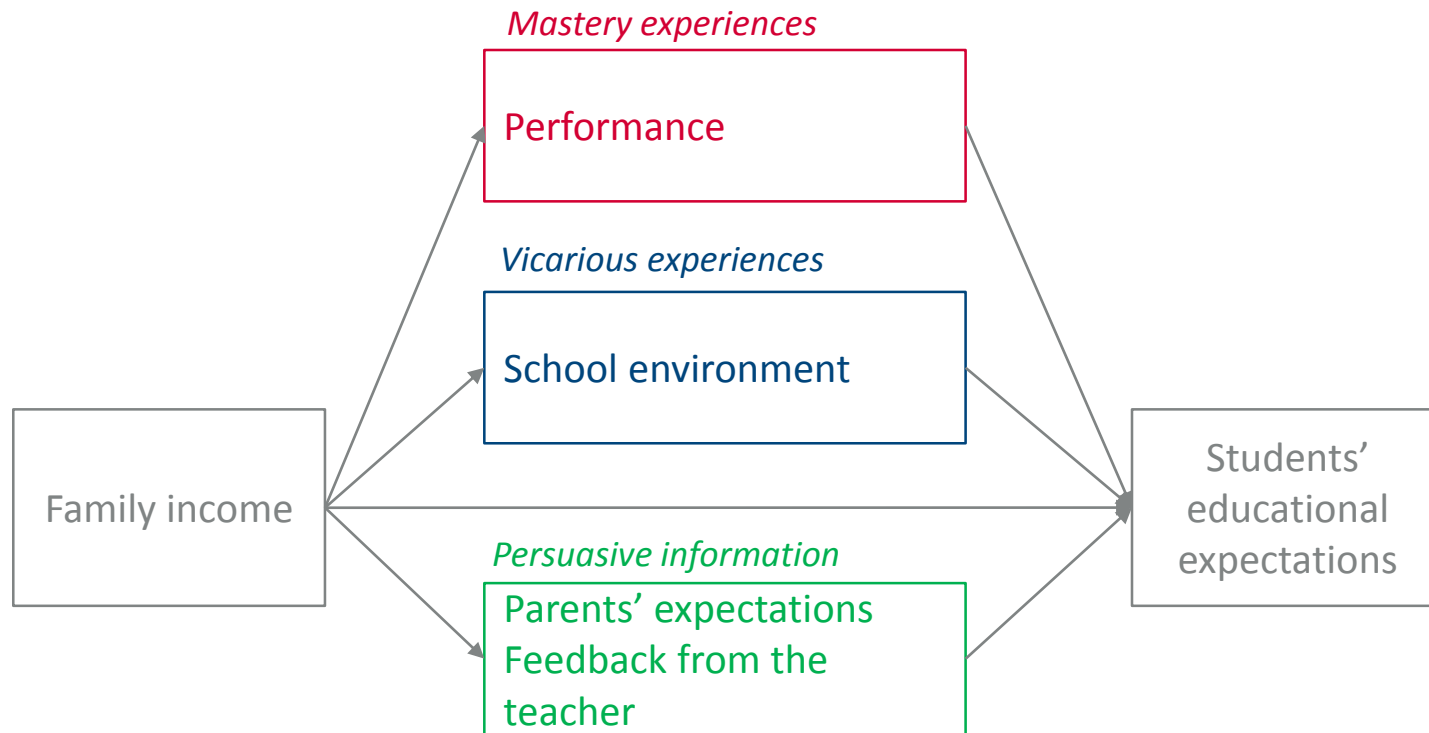
Family context

School context

# Self-Efficacy theory as a possible framework



# Self-Efficacy theory as a possible framework





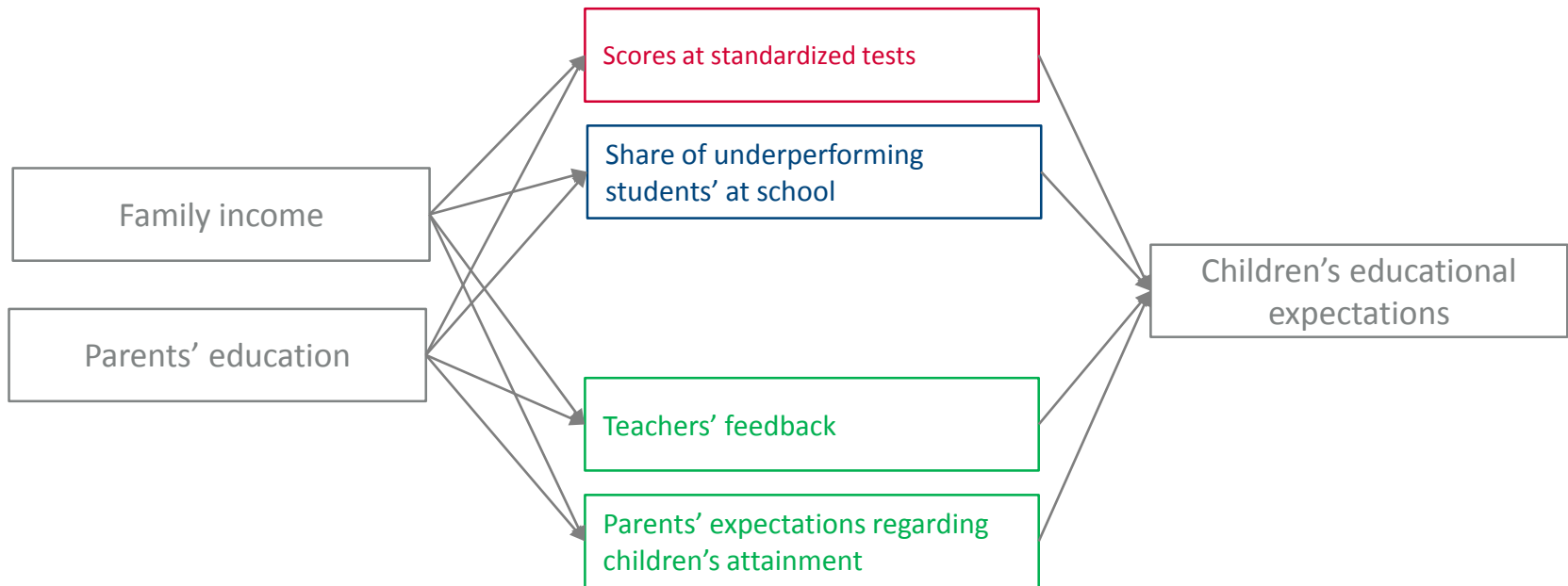
# The Participants

- N = 6545
- All were 9 and 13 years old when data were collected
- Female: 51%
- Mean annual income per family member = €19 271, SD = €8 861
- Income quintiles: Lowest = 14%; 2<sup>nd</sup> = 22%; 3<sup>rd</sup> = 28%; 4<sup>th</sup> = 21%; Highest = 15%
- Most attend mixed-ability class (89%)

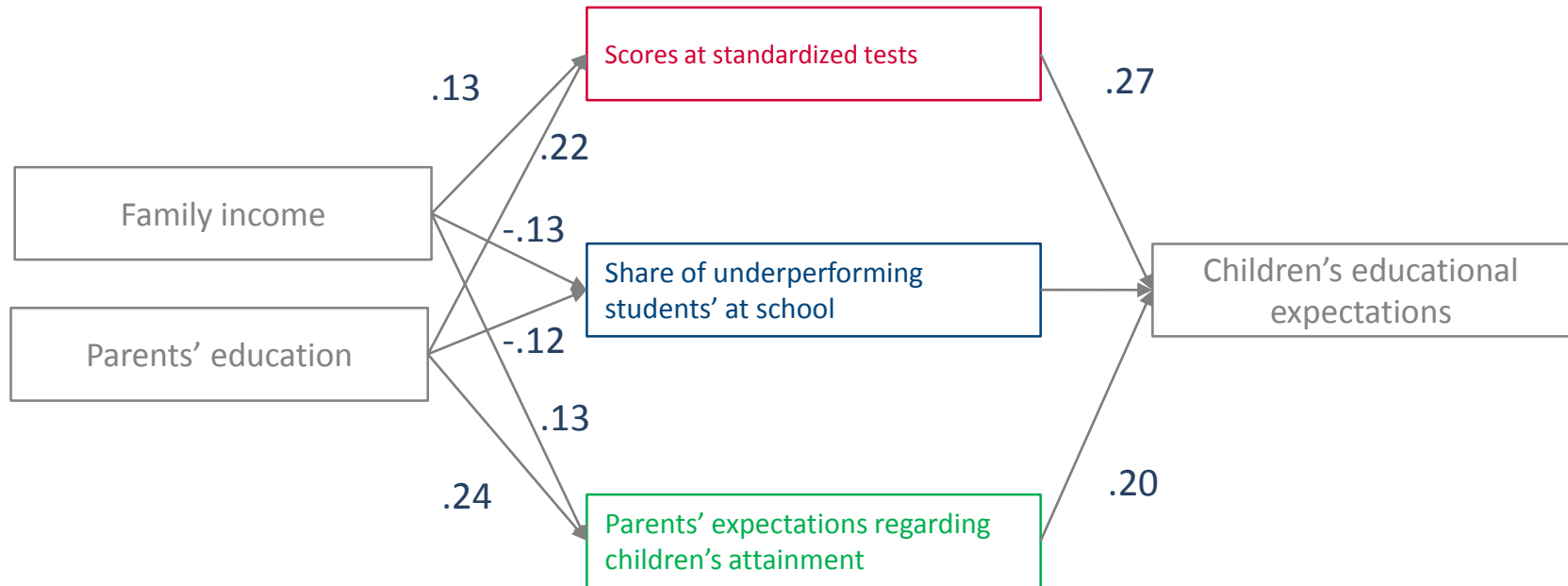
# Measures

- Performance at standardized tests (% of correct answers)
- Share of underperforming students' at school (% of those with numeracy and literacy problems)
- Teachers' feedback: How often does your teacher (1) tells you that your work is good, (2) praises you? (1 = never, 4 = very often)
- Child and parents' educational expectations: How far do you believe you (your child) will go in education?
- Background characteristics of the family (income, parents' education)

# Tested model



# Results: Mediation



Income – ability – children's expectations: Direct = .01; Indirect = .04; Total = .07

Income – school environment – children's expectations: Direct = .01; Indirect = .01; Total = .07

Income – parents' expectations – children's expectations: Direct = .01; Indirect = .03; Total = .07

Parents' edu – ability – children's expectations: Direct = .08; Indirect = .06; Total = .19

Parents' edu – school environment – children's expectations: Direct = .08; Indirect = .01; Total = .19

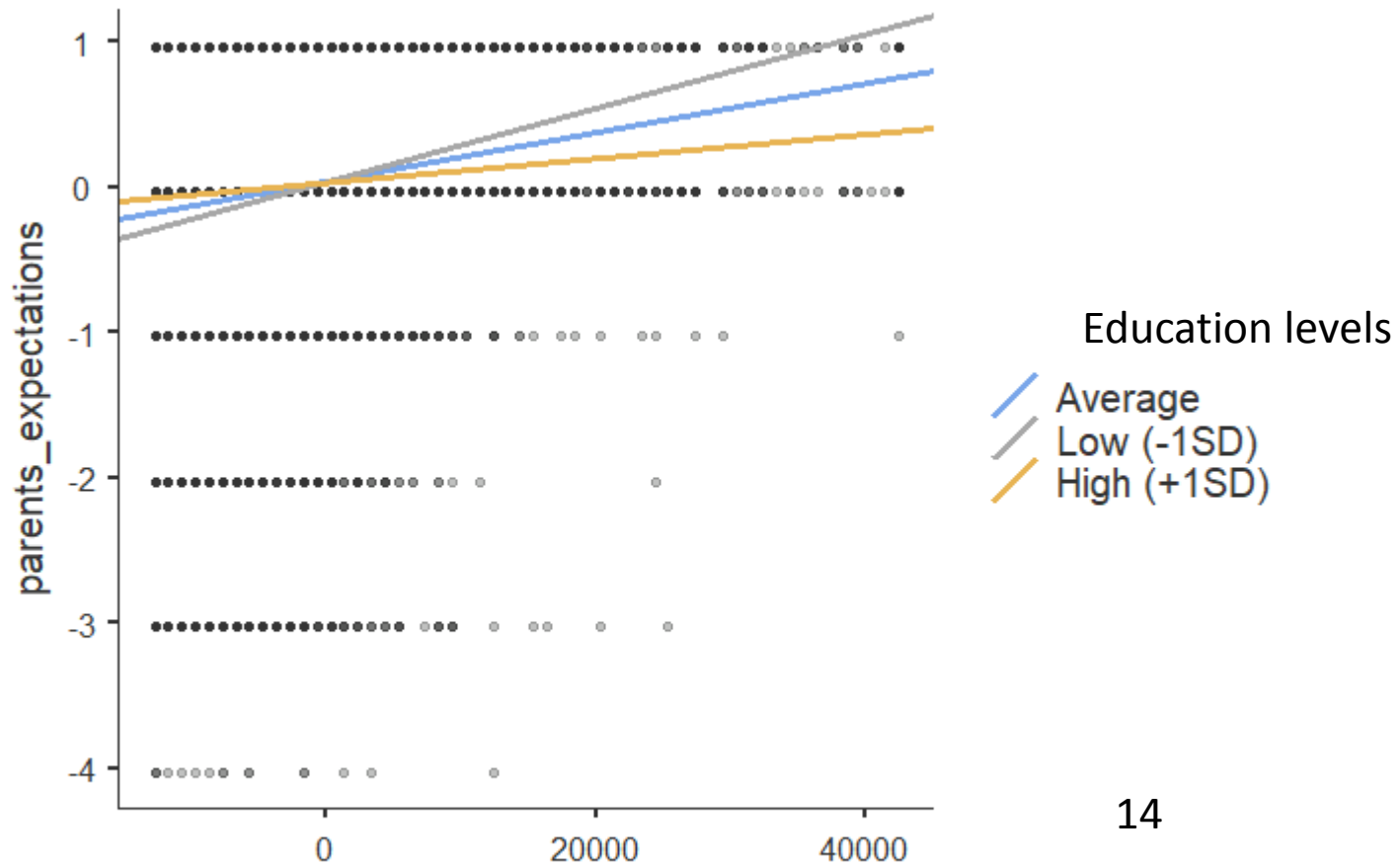
Parents' edu – parents' expect – children's expectations: Direct = .08; Indirect = .05; Total = .19

# Summary of Results

- Performance at standardized tests and parental expectations regarding their children's future educational achievement fully mediate the effect of income on children's educational expectations and partially – the effect of parents' education;
- Performance at standardized tests is the strongest mediator;
- Of course, since there is no direct measure of self-efficacy, I do not claim that it's the only possible mechanism. Other explanations could be plausible (e.g. kids from underprivileged backgrounds simply do not like to study)

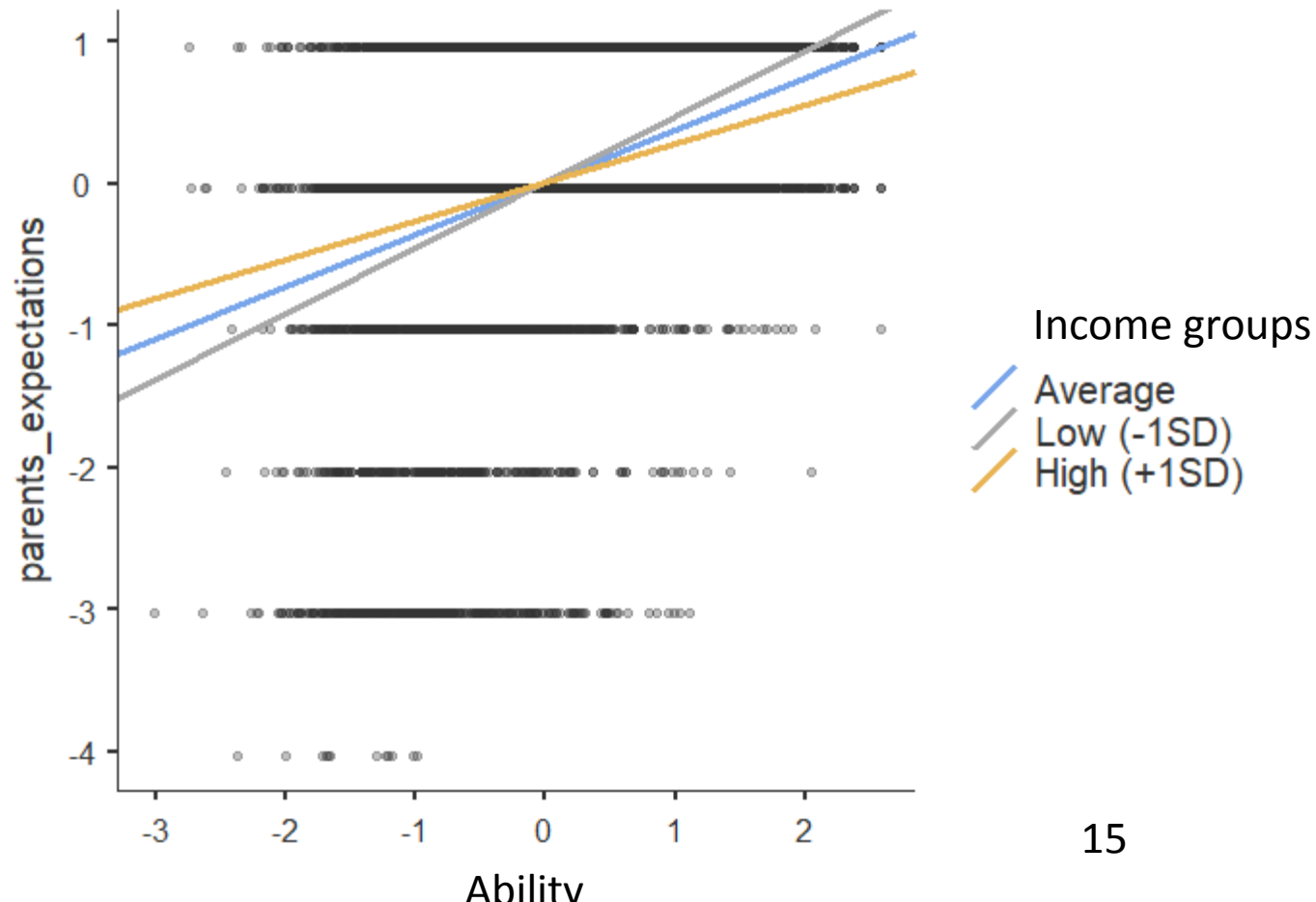
# Results: Interaction between Income and Parents' Education

- Significant interaction effect for the parents' expectations (beta = .12)



# Ability and Income: Interaction effect

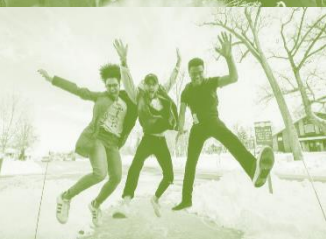
- Significant interaction effect for the parents' expectations (beta = .18)



# Conclusions and implications

- Standardized ability testing at schools – does it do more harm than good?
- What are the ways to improve the outcomes of the disadvantaged children?
- Framing performance results in terms of skills instead of ability
- Fixed vs. Growth mindsets
- Shifting the accent from comparisons with others to comparison with one's previous performance





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**Thank you!**