Causal Effects of Mentoring on Critical Educational Transitions

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We show that a low-intensity mentoring program can boost education outcomes among school children from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Elementary school children who were assigned a mentor for the duration of one year are 11 percentage points (20 percent) more likely to be tracked into the highest German track in grade 5. The effect is particularly pronounced among children who are younger at the time of the treatment and who grow up in poverty. Moreover, the treatment is more effective if and at least one of the parents has obtained an upper secondary school degree and if a student is at the margin of attending the highest school track. Our results suggest that a low intensity mentoring program during a critical decision period can have marked implications for child education outcomes. It closes around 1/3 of the gap in education outcomes between high and low SES children.