

# Students without schools and women without work: the legacy of COVID-19

discussion of

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## The Report

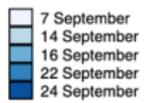
- Costs and benefits of school closures in Italy.
- The report looks at impact of school closures on:
  1. Containment of COVID-19
  2. Students' Educational Achievements
  3. Gender Inequality
- Interesting data. Solid methods. Informative findings.

# My Discussion

- My discussion:
  1. Brief remarks on findings
  2. A complementary perspective based on related research

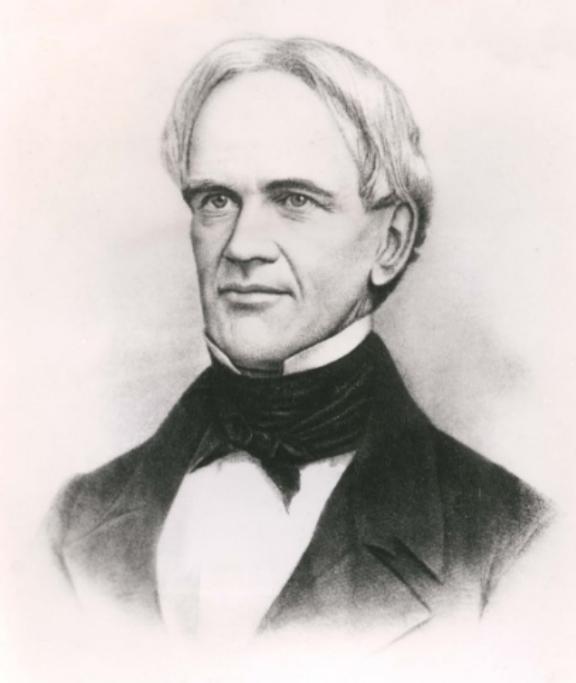
# COVID containment

1. Impact of school reopening on the containment of COVID-19
  - results vary across countries and studies
  - Why?
    - No study is (by necessity) based on a perfect experiment
    - Context may be different
      - E.g., increase in traffic
      - masks/no masks
  - What is imperfect in this report?
    - almost like a two point (North/South) variation
    - confounding factors...
    - evidence from Campania is useful



## Educational Achievements

- School closure: effect on human capital (growth).
  - confirmed by the report using INVALSI test
- Less studied: unequal effects.
  - could be behind some of the attenuation effect?
  - E.g., dropout
- Remarks based on some recent work I did
  - “When the Great Equalizer Shuts Down: Schools, Peers, and Parents” with Francesco Agostinelli, Matthias Doepke, and Giuseppe Sorrenti
  - based on US data, but some lessons are general



“Education, then, beyond all other divides of human origin, is a **great equalizer** of conditions of men, the balance wheel of the social machinery.”

**Horace Mann** (1796 – 1859)

## What We Do

- How can we make predictions about the future without historical precedents?
  - We estimate a model using pre-COVID (US) data.
    - Dynamic model of skill formation
    - Peer effects, parental investments, parenting styles
  - We make plausible (evidence-based) assumptions about changes in environment school closure implies.
  - We run counterfactual simulations.

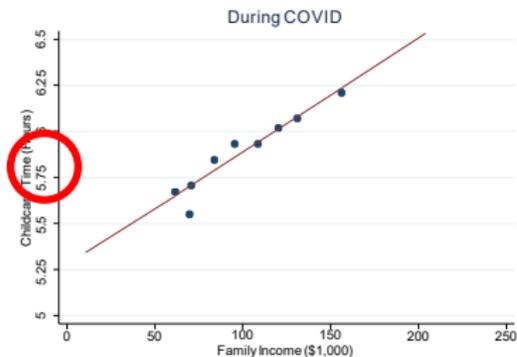
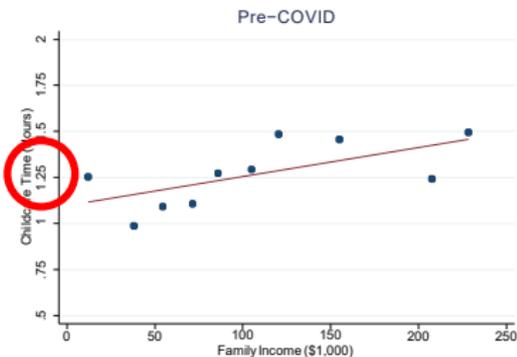
# What Changes in Pandemic Times

- **For children:**
  - Fall in productivity of skill formation technology (no in-class activity)
  - Loss of in-person contact with some friends
  - Changes in peer environment
    - Growing socio-economic segregation

# What Changes in Pandemic Times

- For children:
  - Fall in productivity of skill formation technology (no in-class activity)
  - Loss of in-person contact with some friends
  - Changes in peer environment
    - Growing socio-economic segregation
- **For parents:**
  - New demands on their time imposed by the need of “replacing teachers” ...
  - ... subject to different extents of flexibility (telecommuting) across professions and income levels
  - Responses to changes in peer environments

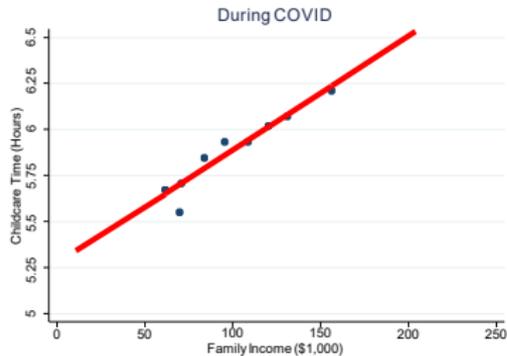
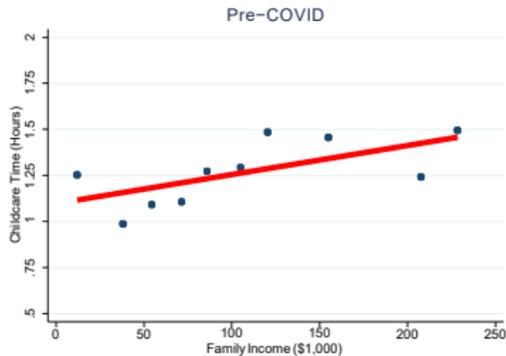
# Family Income and Childcare Time



During the COVID crisis:

- **Average childcare time in the sample goes from 1.3h to 5.8h**
- The socio-economic gradient goes up by a factor of 4

# Family Income and Childcare Time



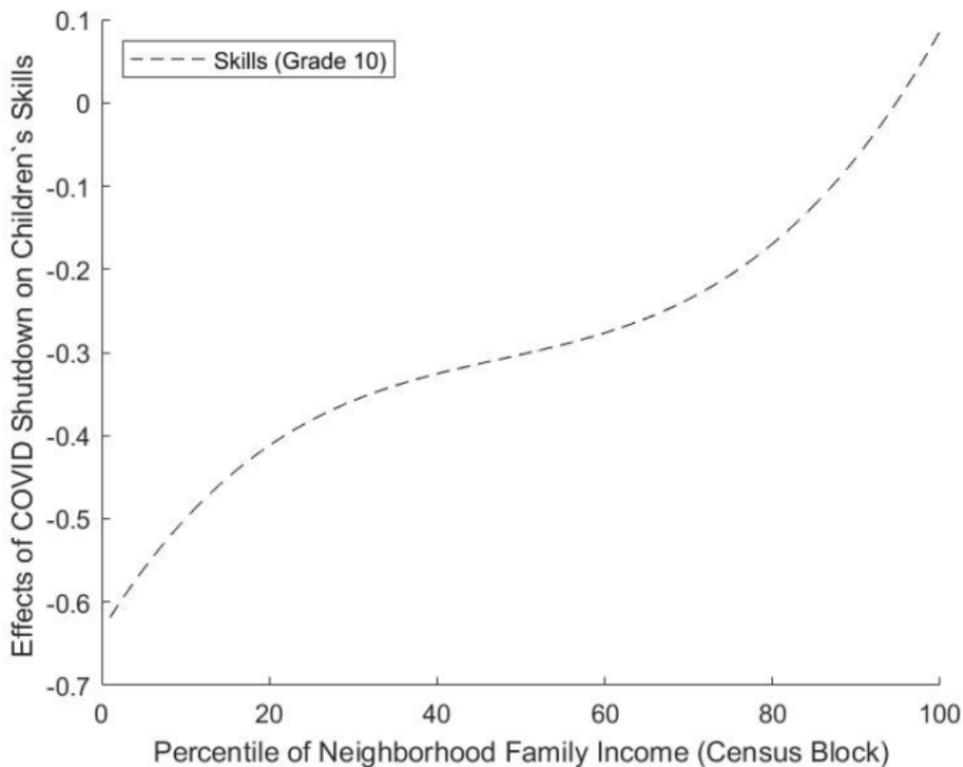
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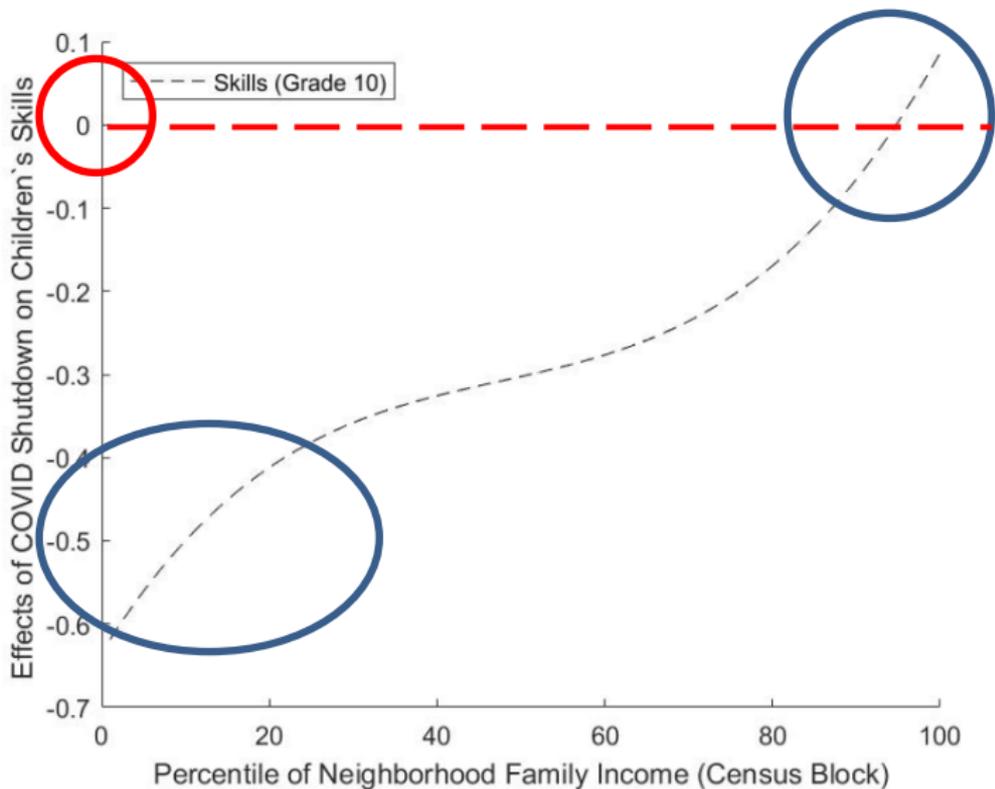
# RESULTS

(for one-year COVID shock)

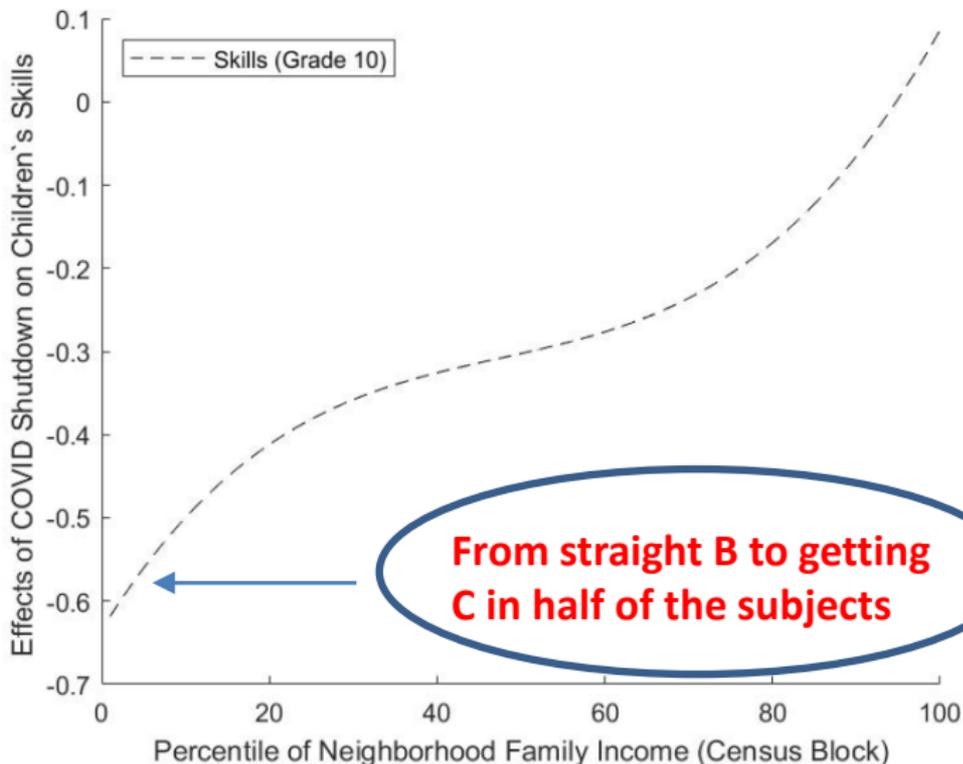
# Effect of School Shutdown on Learning



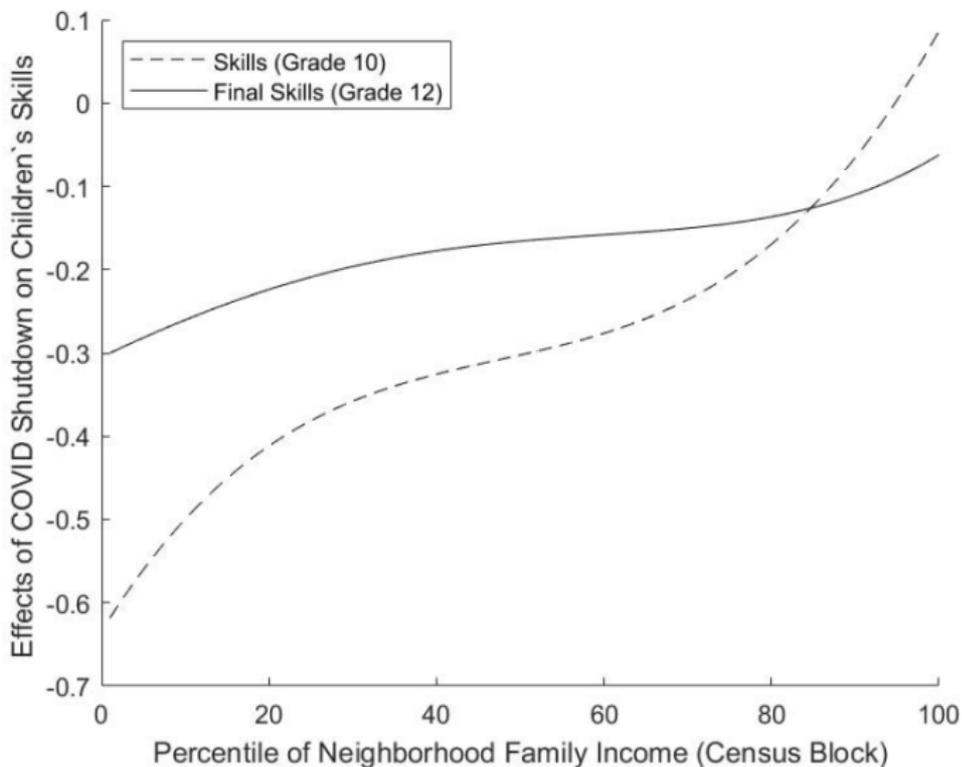
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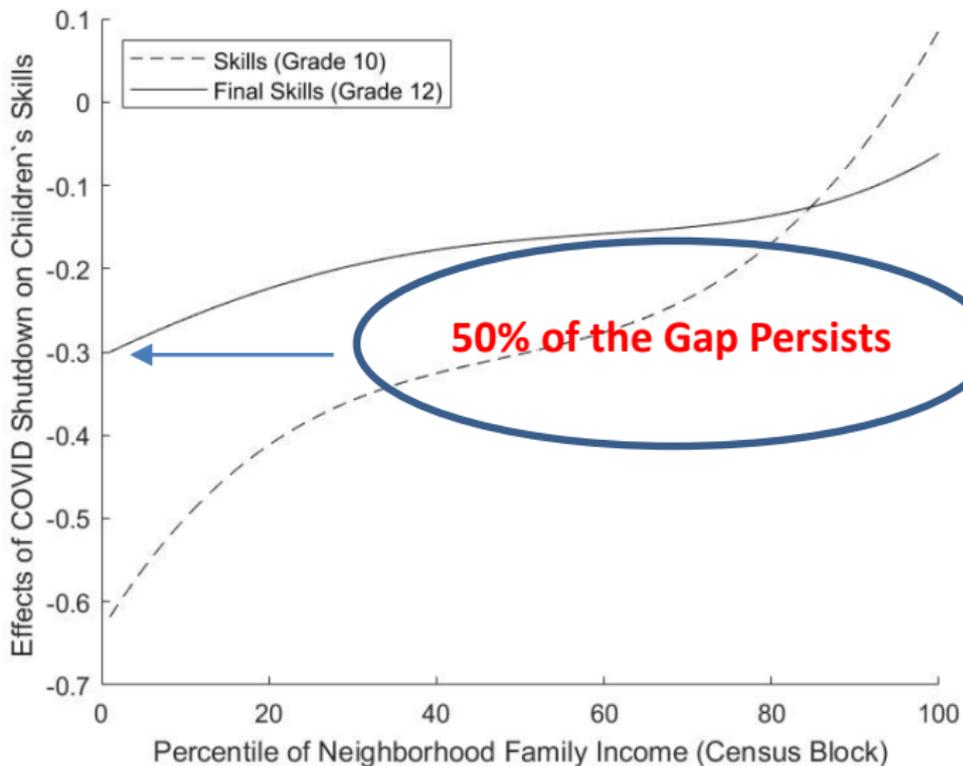
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## Why?

- **Peer effects:** increase in socio-economic segregation during COVID – after lagging behind, less proficient together tend to hang around together and make less contact with other children
- **Parents' direct response:** wealthier and more educated parents can offer remedies for the lack of in-person teaching
- **Endogenous response of parenting style** may foster further segregation
  - children of poor immigrants further lag behind
  - wealthier parents push children away of problematic peers

# Policy Implications

- The effects of COVID are hard to undo and can have lifelong consequences for children's future prospects
- Shorter summer breaks in 2022?
  - Or targeted support to disadvantaged groups
  - Require specific public investments...
- Inequality likely to increase more where residential inequality is highest
  - Cities vs. rural areas

## Gender Inequality

- Broadly in line with studies for other countries.
- Evidence clearly indicates stronger effect of COVID shock on female earnings and labor supply
  1. Just a symptom of something we already knew?
  2. Or is COVID effect going to persist?
- Two interpretations (right vs. left):
  1. Rational response of unitary household
  2. Reflection of cultural stereotypes («if children need more time, it is for mothers to stay at home»)

## Gender Inequality

- Among the various pieces of evidence, most disturbing is QUIT behavior
  - During recessions quits fall (standard fact)
  - But quits fall significantly LESS for women
  - More women are willing (or induced to) quit their job
- Policy (to avoid that effects persist!):
  - Fight detachment from labor market, keep people in the labor force
  - (Targeted?) fiscal incentive to bring people (especially, women) back to work
  - Also, fiscal incentives for young people to enter labor force
  - Sustain participation, big issue in Italy (NEET...)