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Center for the Study of Inequality

It's All Family . . .

Stephen L. Morgan

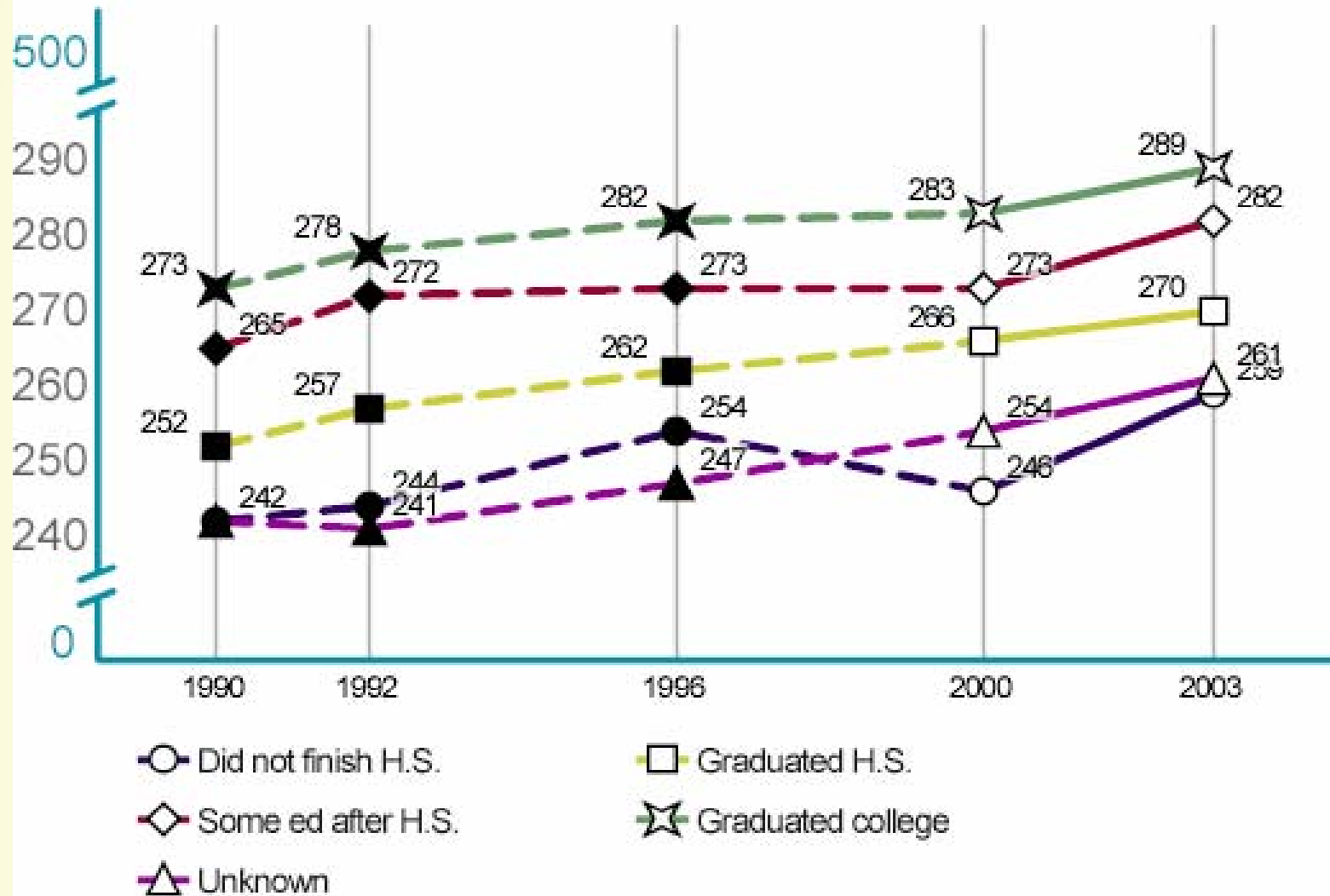
Department of Sociology

Three goals for my 20 minutes:

1. Explain why family background is an important predictor of achievement in K through 12 schooling
2. Characterize race and gender effects on achievement as substantially less important
3. Set the stage for my colleagues, David and Shelley, who will then attempt to convince you that I am completely wrong

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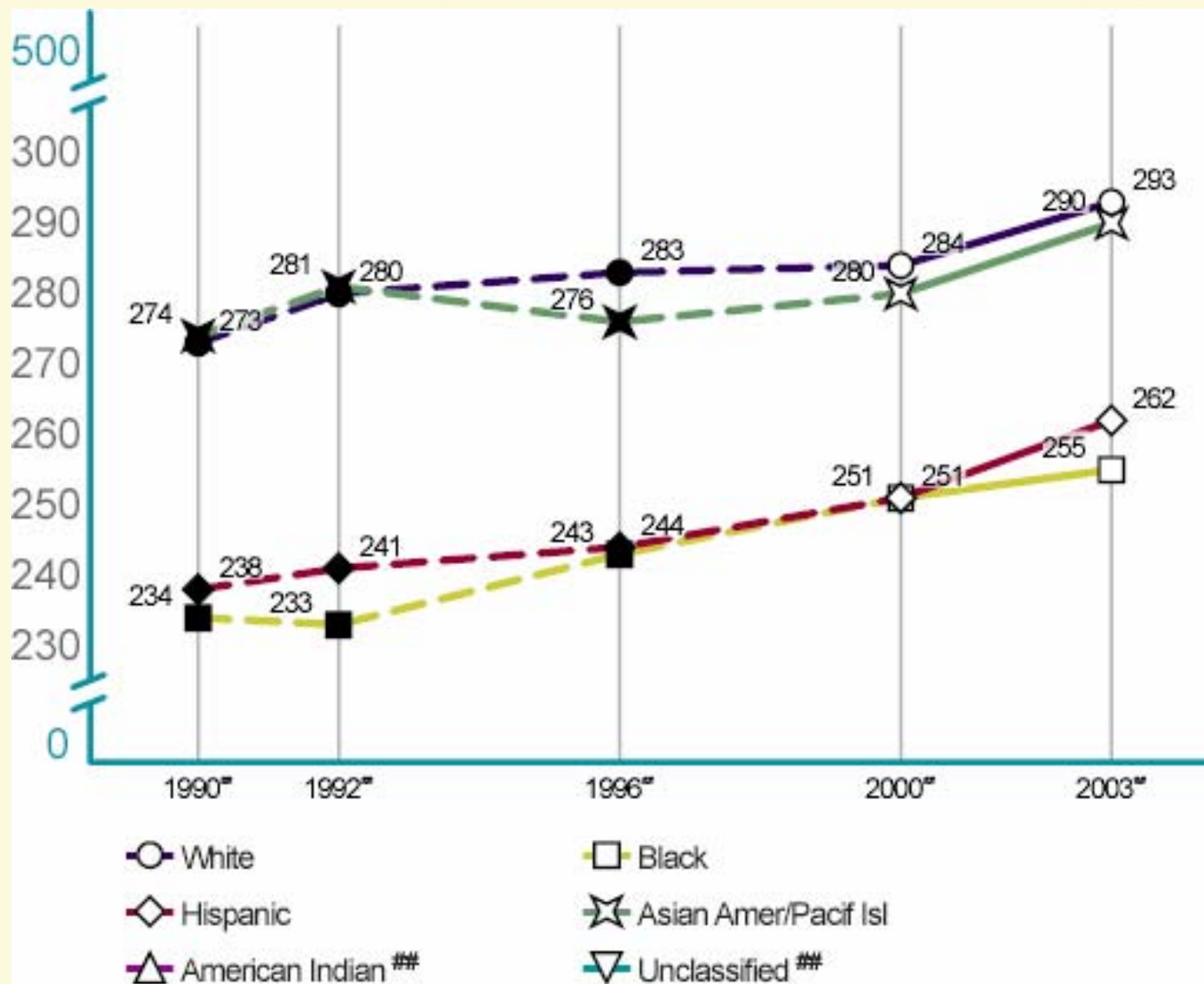
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NAEP Math Scores for 8th Graders in New York State from 1990-2003, by Parental Education

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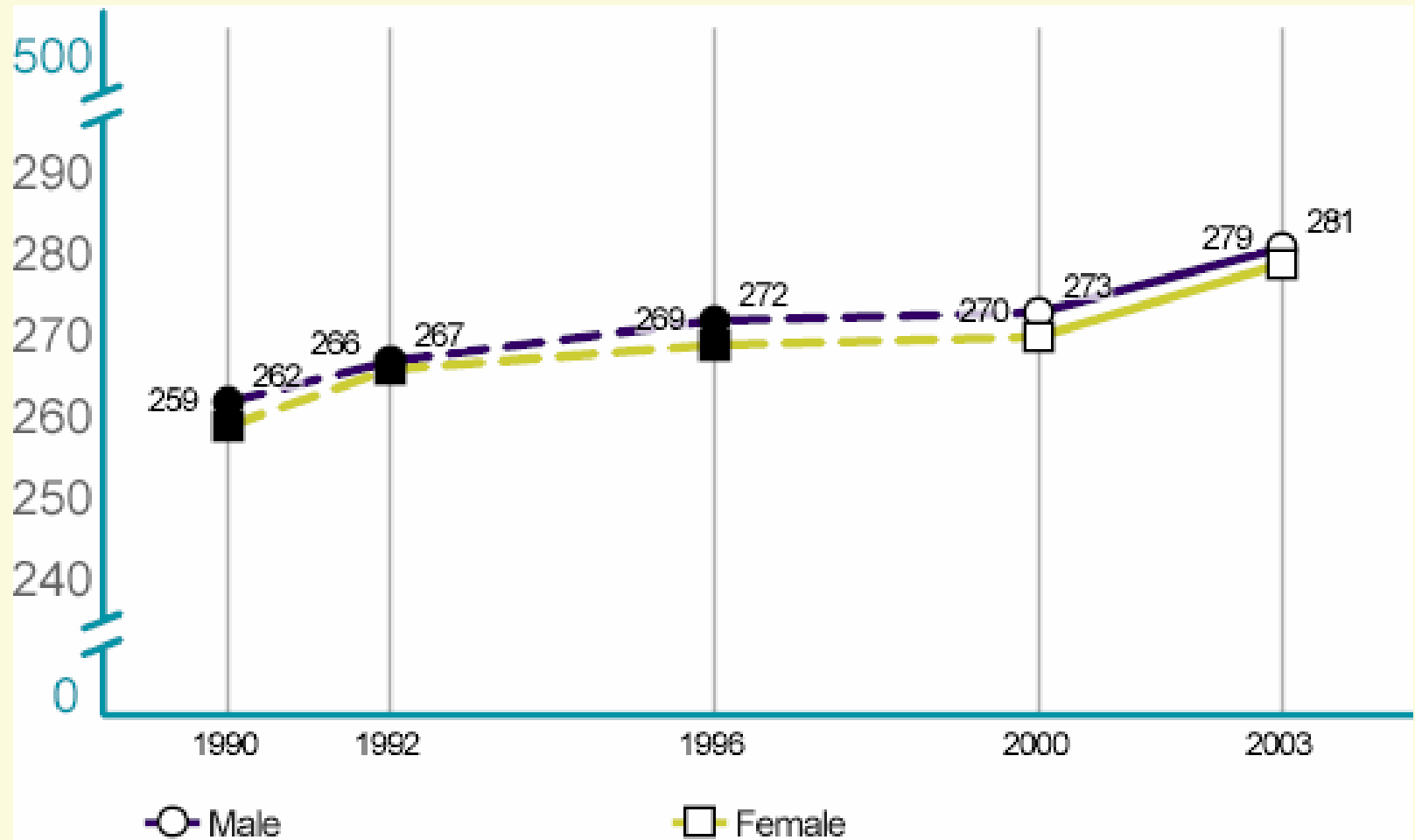
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NAEP Math Scores for 8th Graders in New York State from 1990-2003, by Race

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NAEP Math Scores for 8th Graders in New York State
from 1990-2003, by Gender

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High School Drop-Out Rates for the United States from 1972-2001, by Family Income

The Coleman Report of 1966: *Equality of Educational Opportunity*

Two main questions

- How large are differences across schools in facilities and resources?
- How important are facilities and resources for student achievement?

The surprising results

- Resource differences across schools are substantial but not dramatic
- Family background is much more important than school resources

(And, the most powerful predictor of achievement: a vacuum cleaner in the home)

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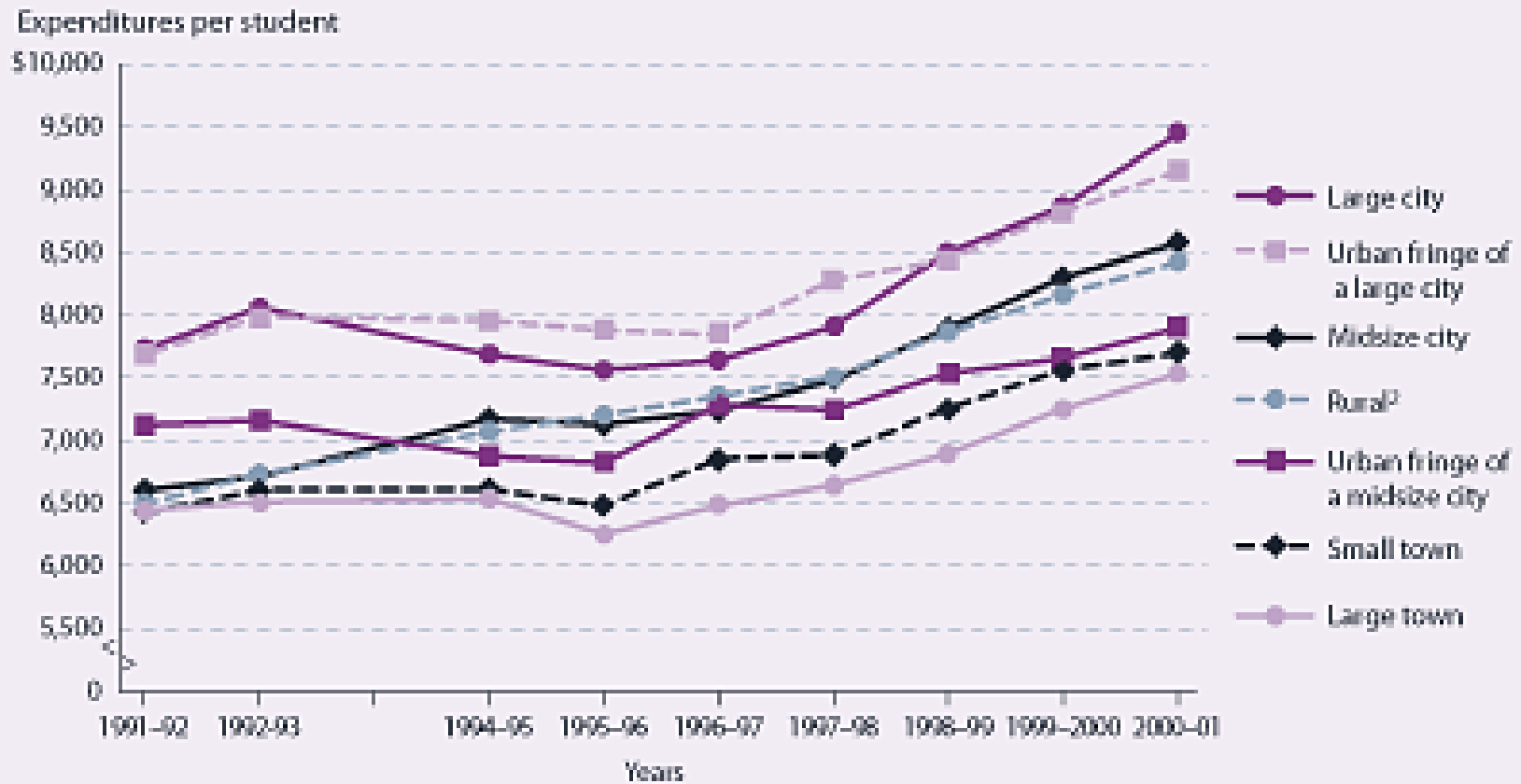
Never fear, the report did not deter spending . . .

Public School Resources, 1961–1991

| <i>Resource</i> | 1960– 61 | 1965– 66 | 1970– 71 | 1975– 76 | 1980– 81 | 1985– 86 | 1990– 91 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Pupil-Teacher Ratio | 25.6 | 24.1 | 22.3 | 20.2 | 18.8 | 17.7 | 17.3 |
| Percentage Teachers with Master's Degree | 23.1 | 23.2 | 27.1 | 37.1 | 49.3 | 50.7 | 52.6 |
| Median Years Teacher Experience | 11 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 12 | 15 | 15 |
| Current Expenditure/ADA (1992–93 dollars) | \$1,903 | \$2,402 | \$3,269 | \$3,864 | \$4,116 | \$4,919 | \$5,582 |

Source: U.S. Department of Education (1995).

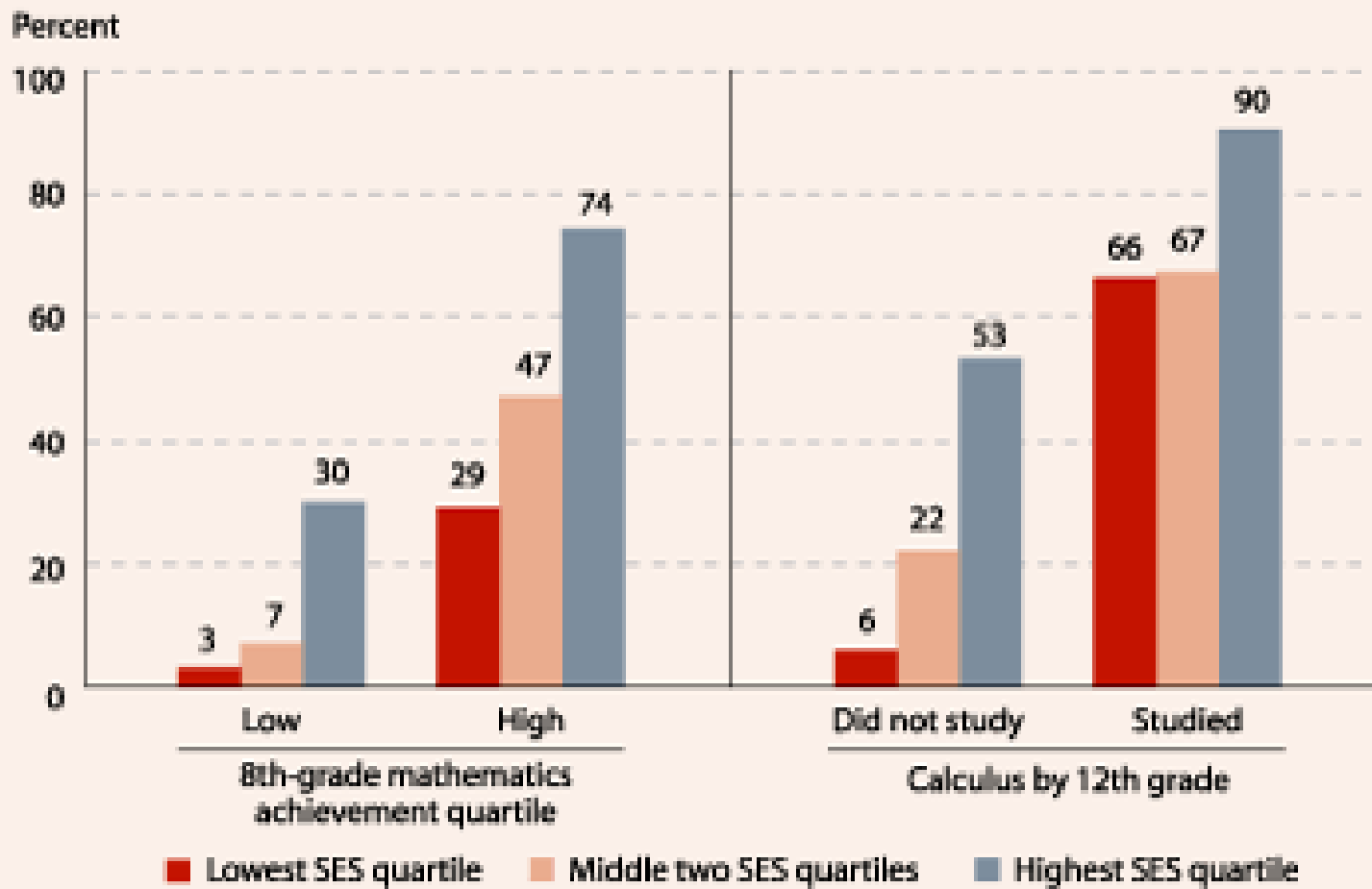
And these trends continue . . .



Total expenditures per student, 1991-2001

How Can the Coleman Report be True?

- Across schools, average family background is highly correlated with levels of school resources
 - As a result, we cannot attribute corresponding achievement differences to one or the other
- But, there are important within-school effects of family background
 - Disadvantaged students who attend resource-rich schools still do relatively poorly
 - Advantaged students who attend resource-poor schools still do relatively well

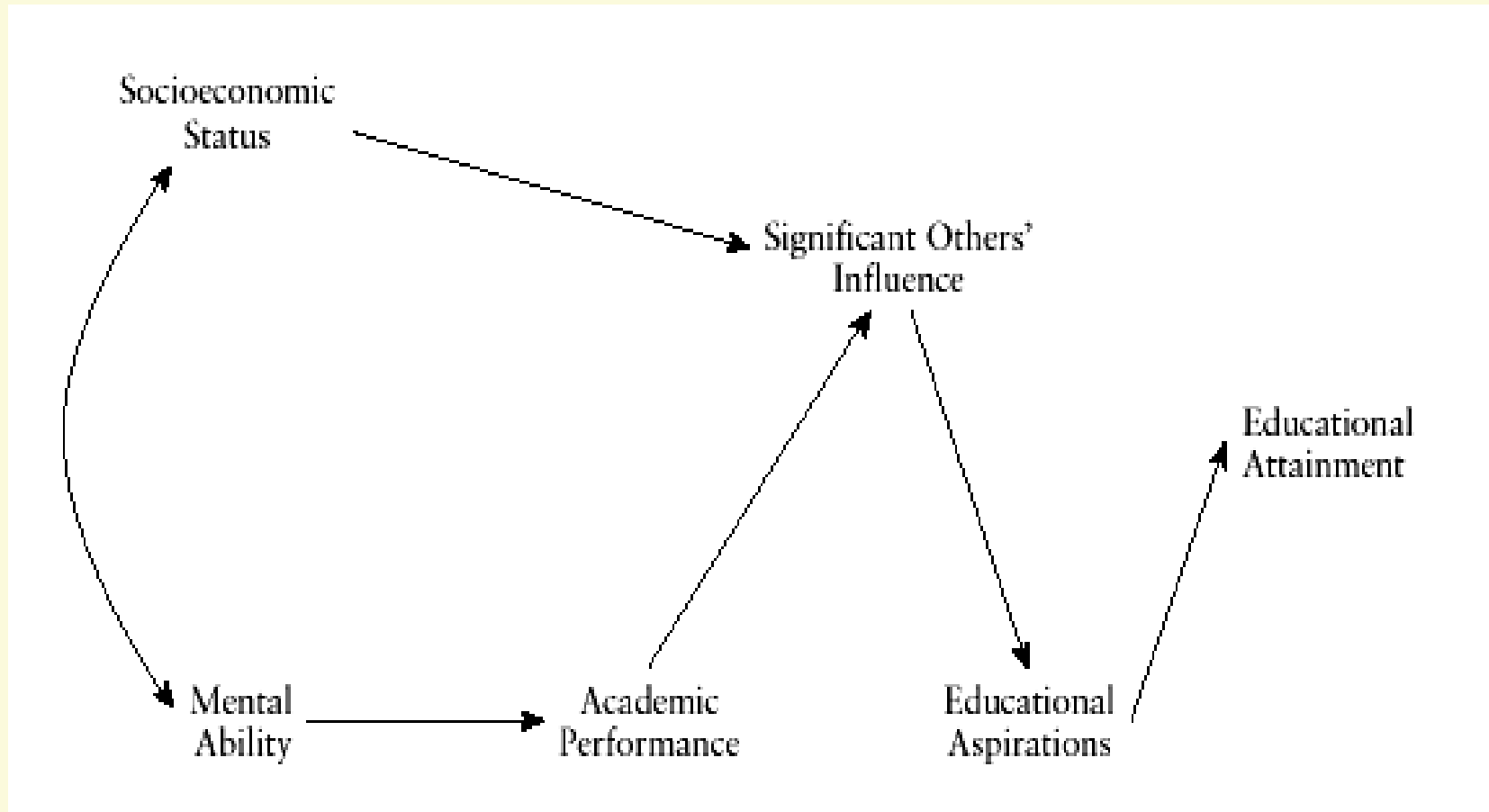


Percentage of 8th Graders in 1988 who had Attained a BA or better by 2000, by SES and Prior Math

Some Mechanisms for Family Background Effects

- Ambition
 - Success is doing a bit better than one's parents did
- Parental influence
 - Parents who are college graduates are better at convincing their children that schooling pays off
- Teacher expectations
 - Kids should end up like their parents
- Peer groups accentuate these effects

The “Wisconsin Model”



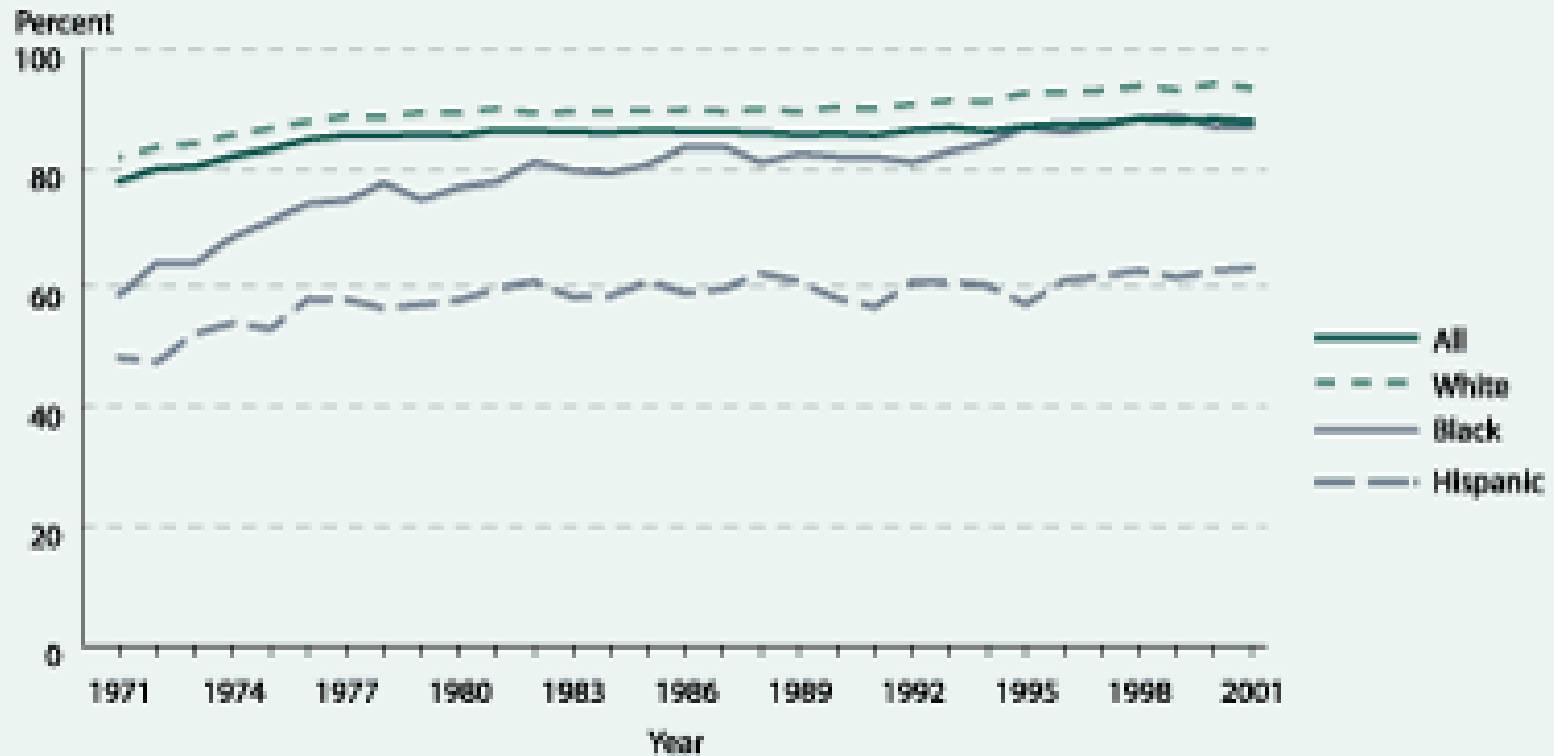
A second wave of mechanisms . . .

- Upper-middle-class parents are more comfortable “intervening” in schooling
- Unfair evaluations of performance
 - Assignments are designed to reveal cultural competence
 - Grades reflect conformity to upper-middle class modes of behavior
- The structure of schools
 - Teaching is better in more challenging classes
 - Remedial classes are traps that produce the underperformance they are meant to address

Conclusions

- These mechanisms for family background effects are non-exhaustive and non-mutually-exclusive
- All are supported by some convincing evidence, but we really do not know definitively what is most important
- In conclusion, it's all family . . . with just a bit of race and gender too

(Go to the CSI website at www.inequality.com if you would like a copy of these slides)

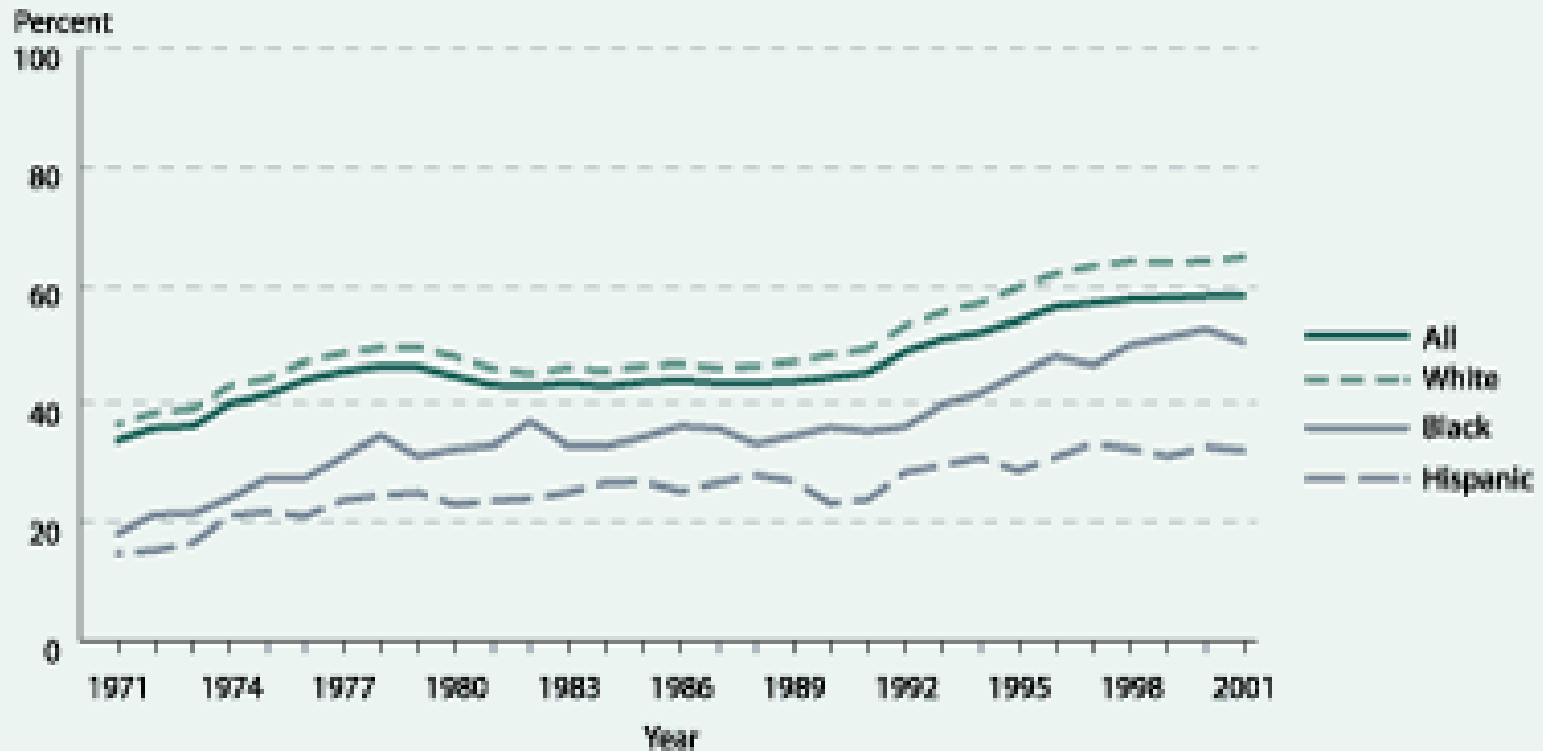


High School Completion Rates for 25 to 29
year olds, by race/ethnicity from 1971-2001

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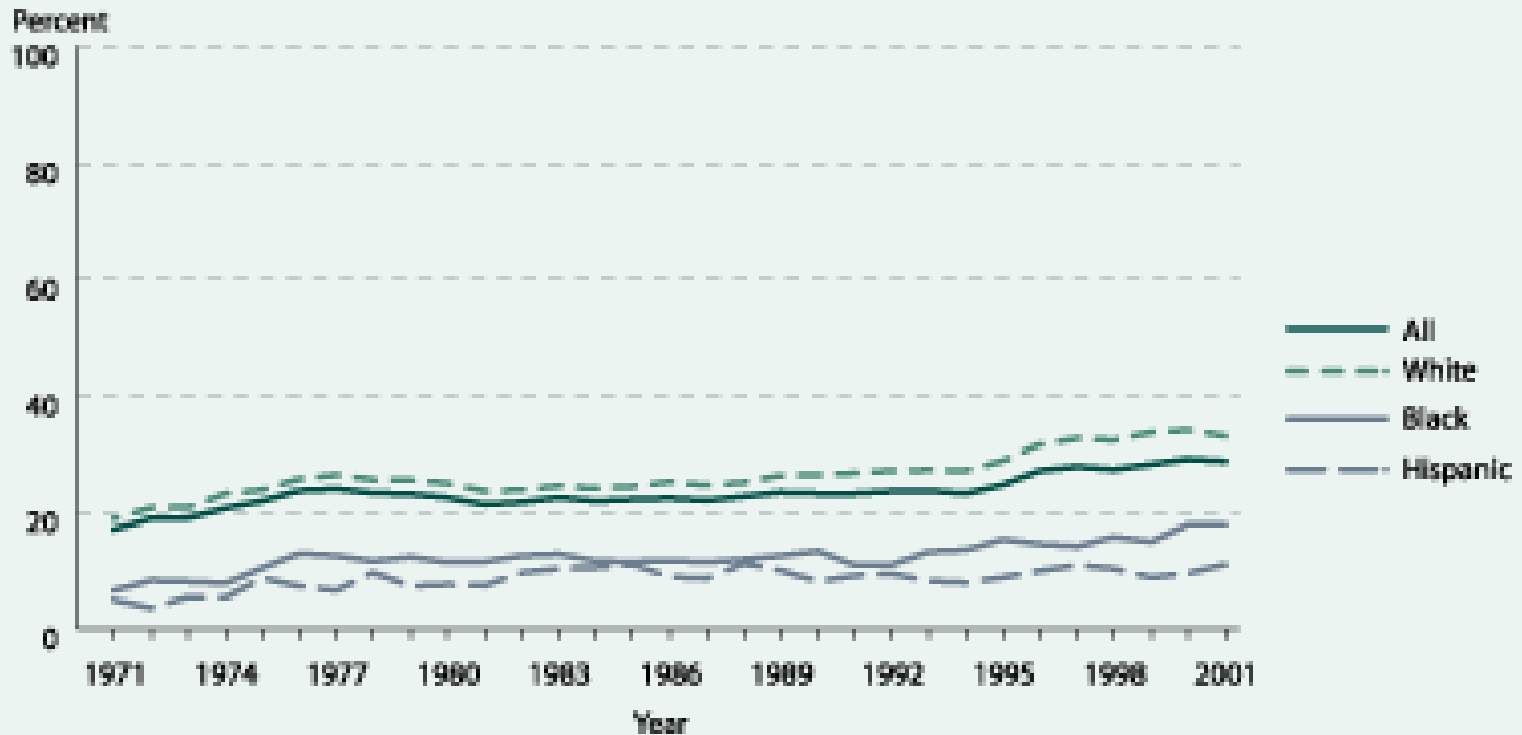
Same picture for “some college”



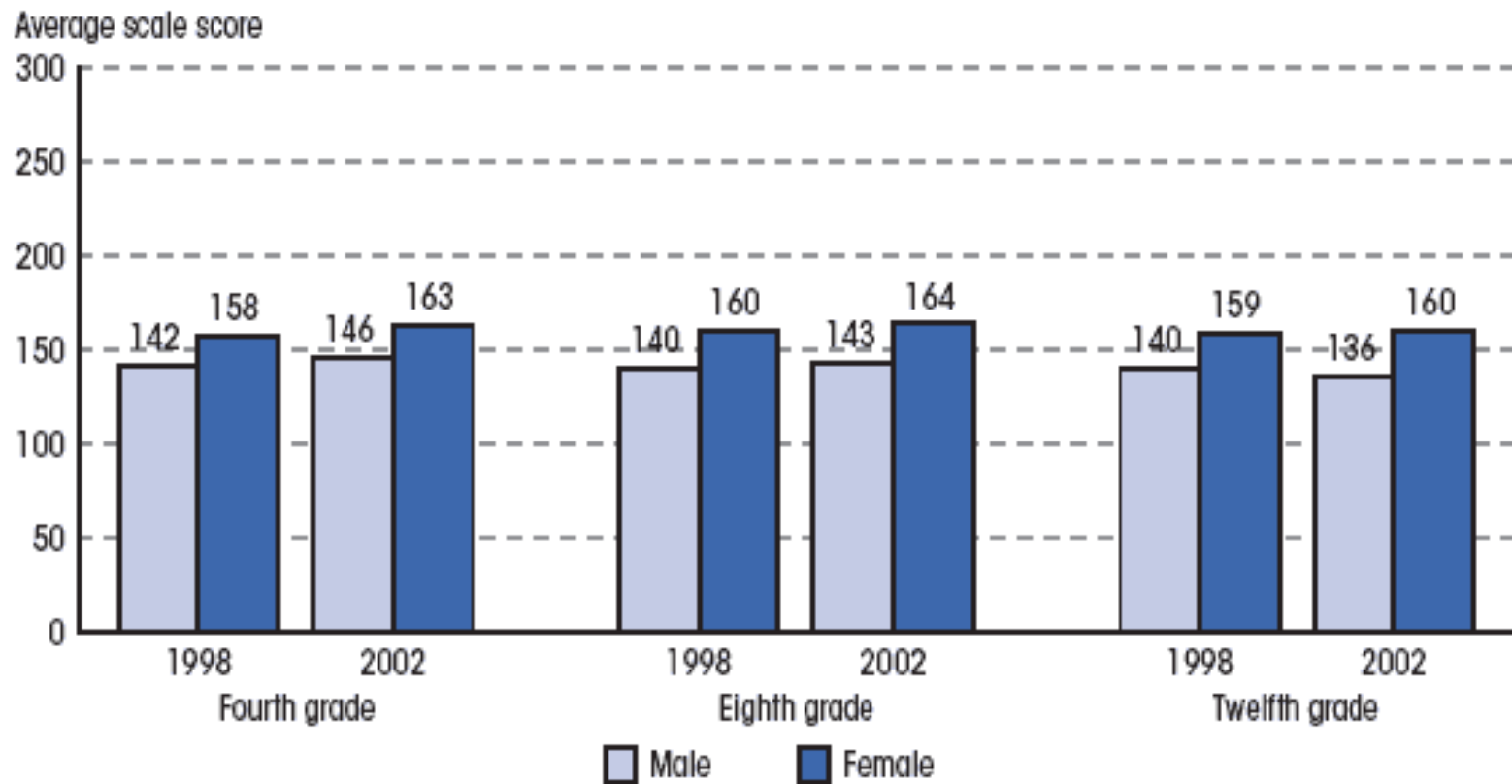
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Same picture for “BA or higher”



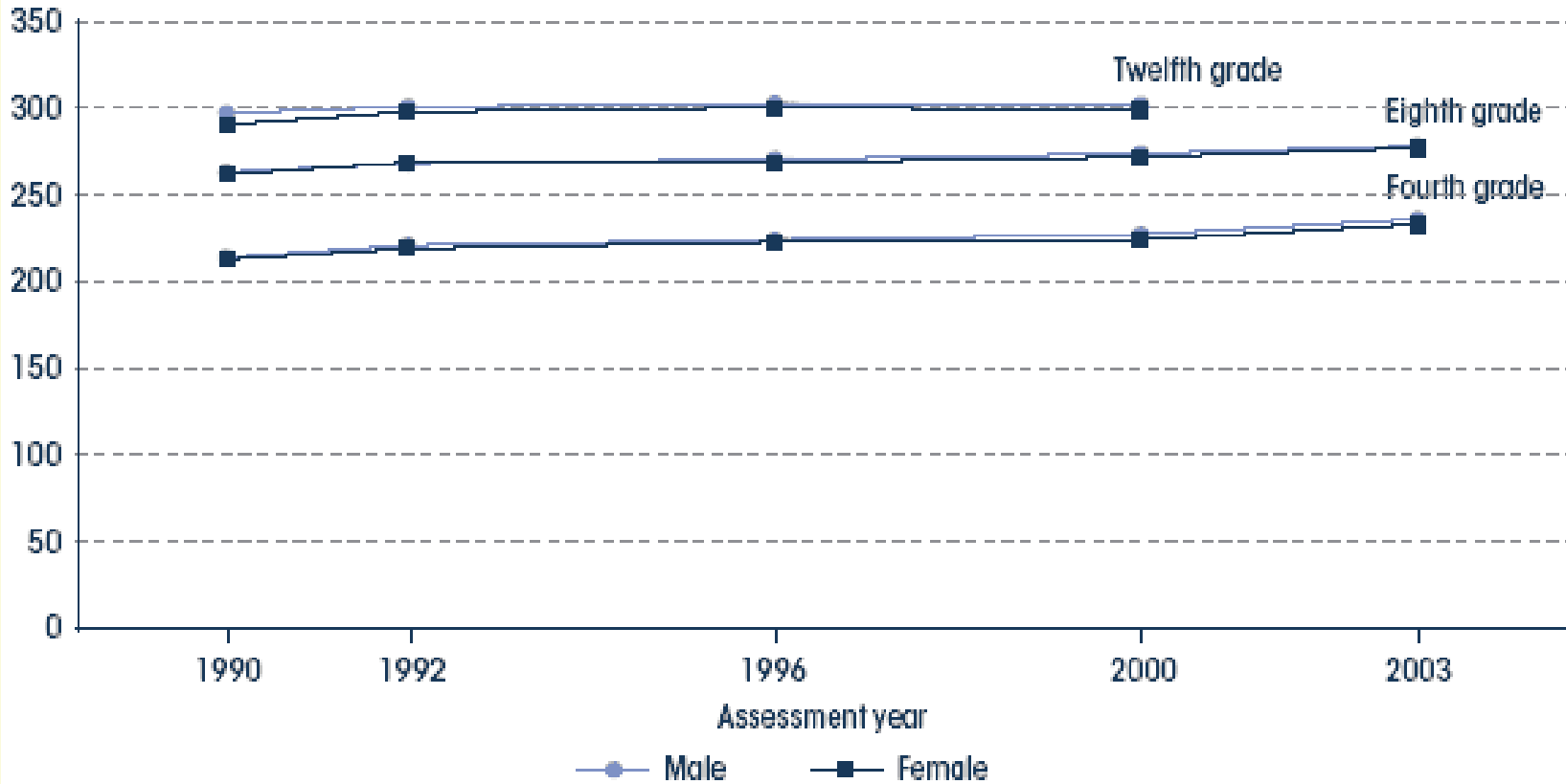
Girls now do better in reading. . .



NAEP Reading Scores

Almost as well in math . . .

Average scale score

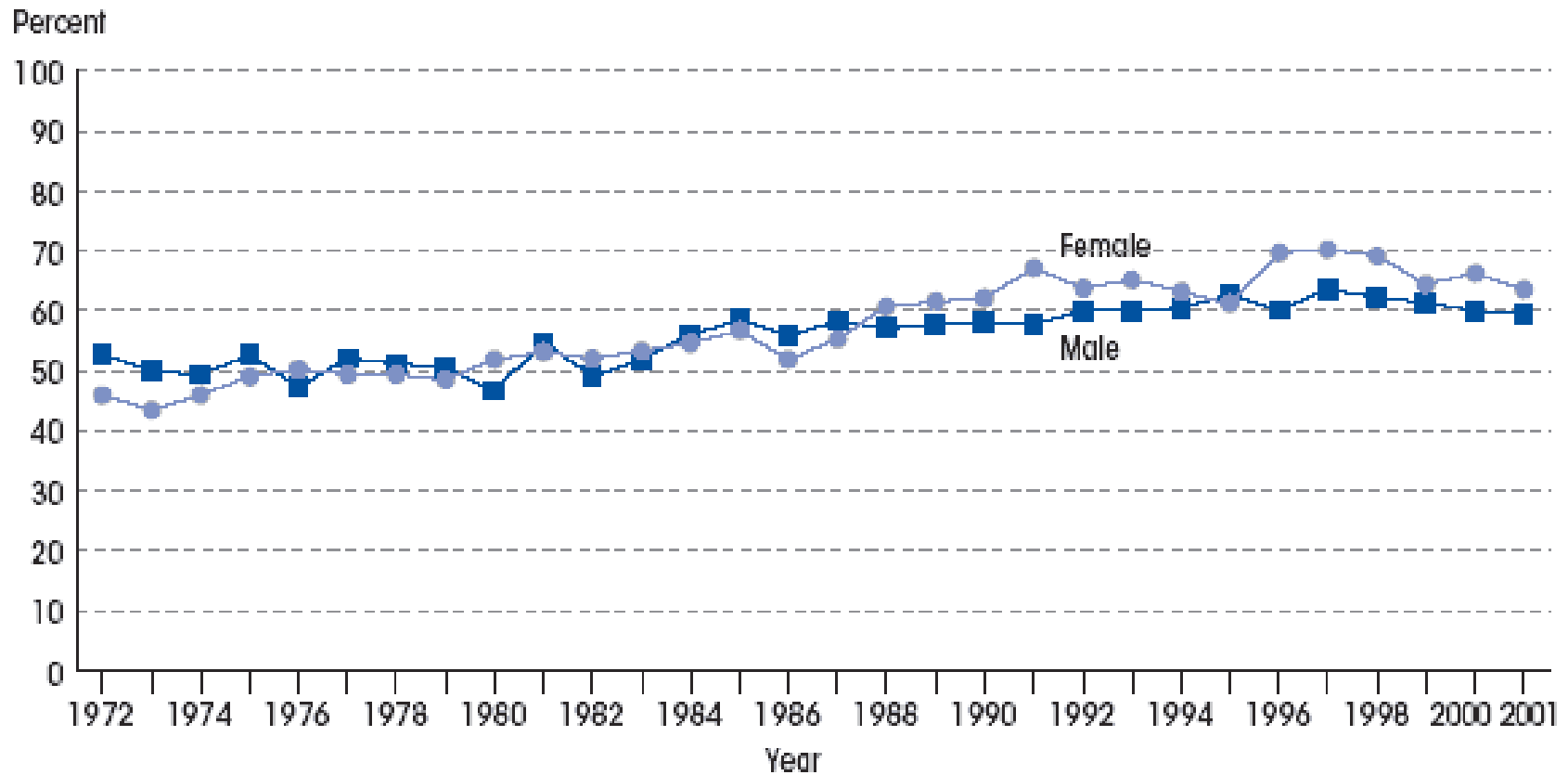


NAEP Math Scores

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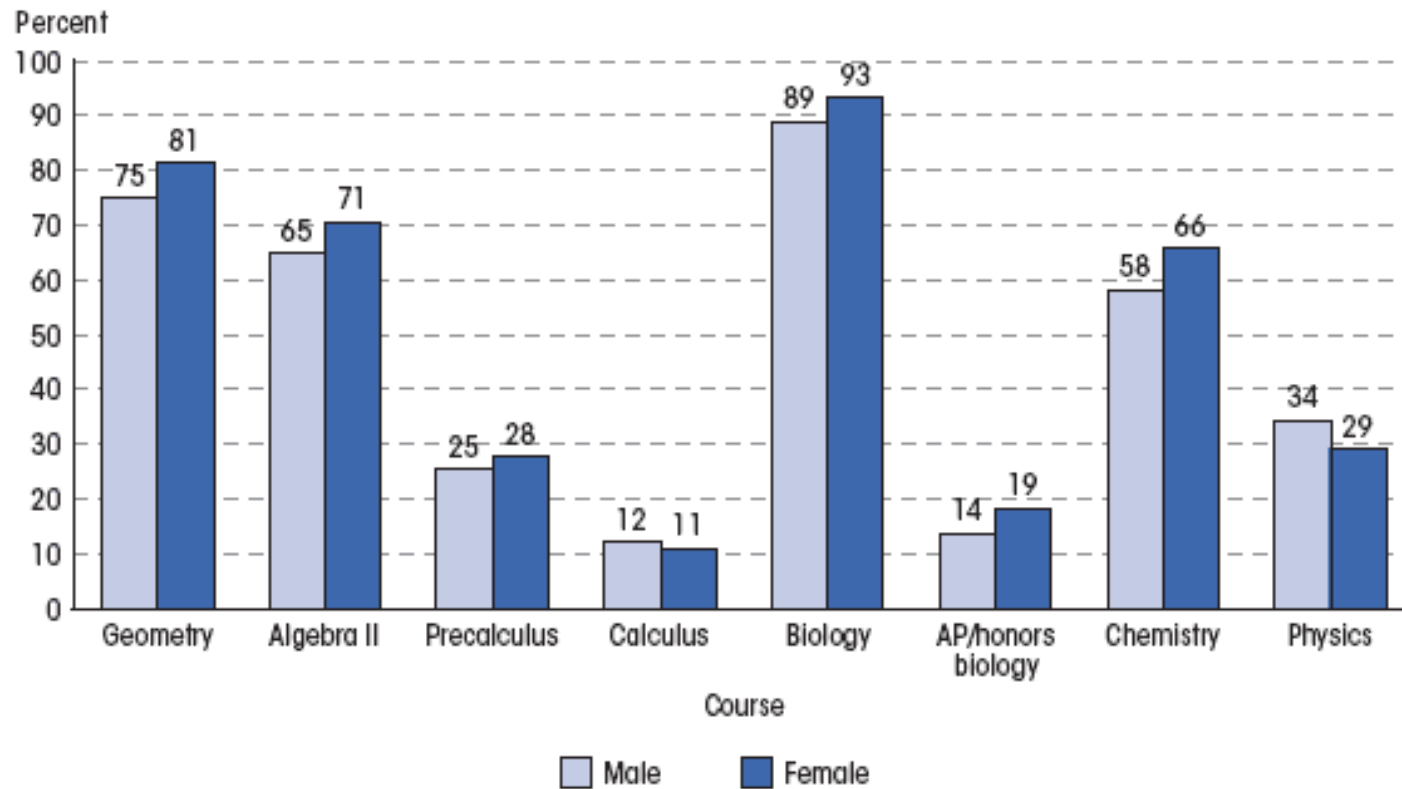
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And they enter college . . .



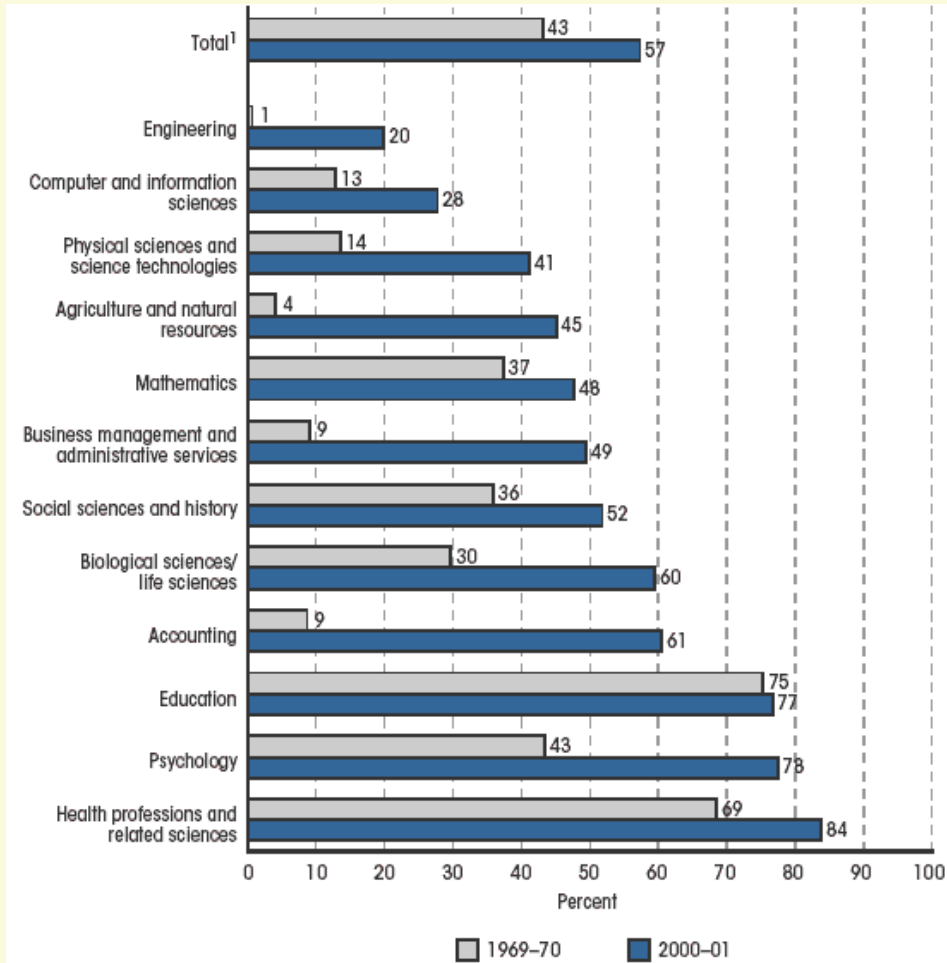
College Entry Rates of High School Graduates

Rather small differences in high school course-taking . . .



High School Courses for the Class of 2000

And this is major progress . . .



Percentage of BAs conferred to females in 1969-70 and 2000-01