

“(In)Equality of Opportunity, Mentoring, and Critical Educational Decisions”,
with Armin Falk and Fabian Kosse

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7 May 2019

Inequality of opportunity strikes when two children with the same abilities and academic performance are sent to different quality schools because their parents differ in socio-economic status. Based on a novel dataset for Germany, we demonstrate that children are significantly less likely to enter the highest quality school track if their parents are poor, even after conditioning on a rich set of ability and performance measures. We then provide causal evidence that a low-intensity mentoring program can reduce inequality of opportunity and boost children's education outcomes. Low socio-economic status children, who were randomly assigned to a mentor for the duration of one year, are 20 percent more likely to enter the high track in grade 5. The effect is particularly pronounced among children who grow up in poverty, and seems to be driven by a change in parental decision-making and teacher recommendations alike.