



Department of Economics

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Teacher Unionization and Student Academic Performance: Will the Weakening of Teachers' Unions Harm the Middle Class and Intensify Inequality?

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Direct Effects of Organized Labor on Inequality and the Middle Class

- Levy and Temin 2007 – Declining unionism has contributed to reduced bargaining power and rising inequality.
- Farber et al 2018 – Unions reduce inequality by raising relative wages of the less skilled.
- Freeman et al 2015 – Children of union members experience more upward mobility than do children of non-union members.



“Indirect Effects” of Teachers’ Unions on Inequality and the Middle Class

- After the Supreme Court’s decision on Janus vs. AFSCME (2018) and as other limitations on teachers’ unions grow, what are the likely effects on educational outcomes of students?
- Might these effects vary by “class”?



How Do Teachers' Unions Affect Student Outcomes?

- Positive Effects
 - Increasing resources, attracting and retaining good teachers through better pay and working conditions
 - Professional engagement and “voice” effects
- Negative Effects
 - Increasing costs, reducing flexibility



Identifying “Class”-Specific Effects of Teachers’ Unions on Student Outcomes

- Outcome Measure: District-level test score averages, grades 3-8, from Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA), 2008-09 and 2012-13
- “Class” Measure: SES index from SEDA, based on district income, education, poverty, unemployment, female headship, and SNAP receipt indicators. Districts classed as high (top 25%), middle (middle 50%), and low (bottom 25%) SES

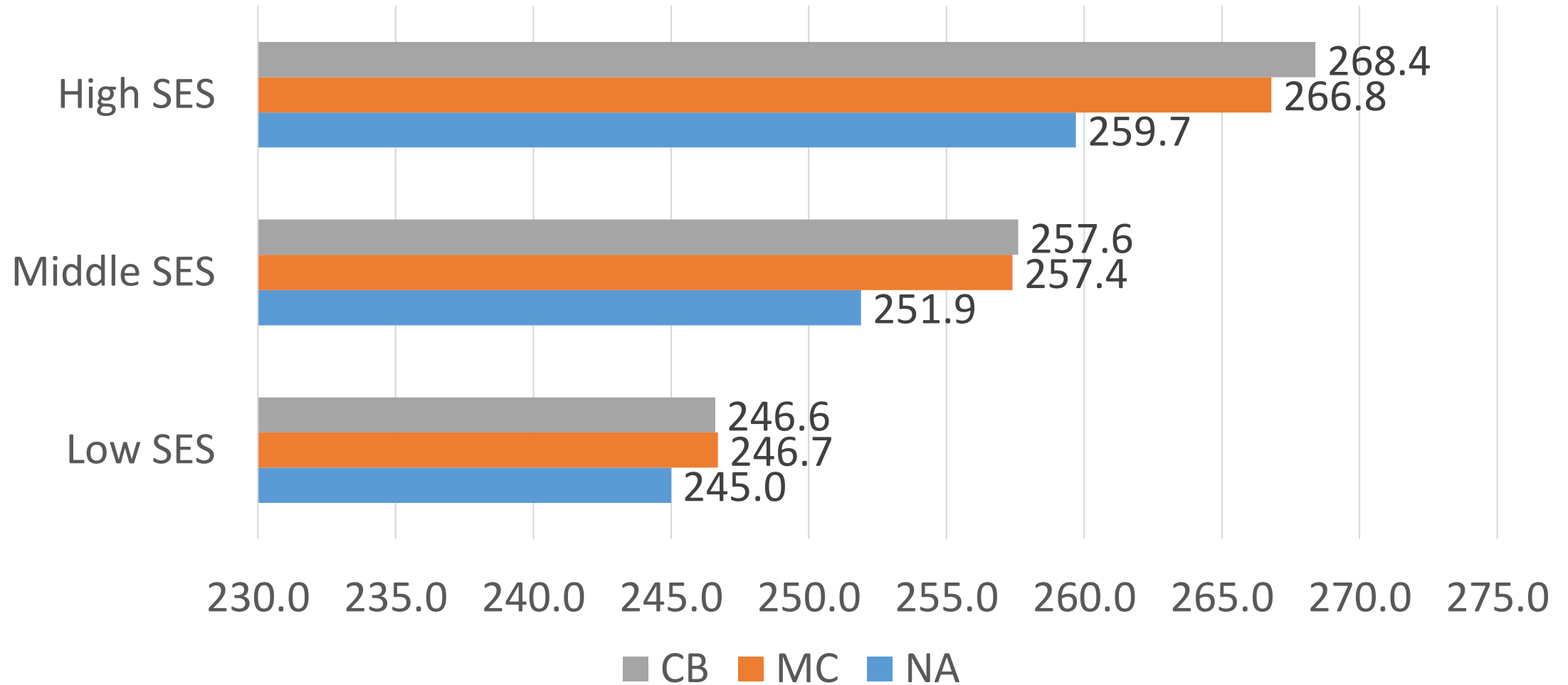


Identifying “Class”-Specific Effects of Teachers’ Unions on Student Outcomes (2)

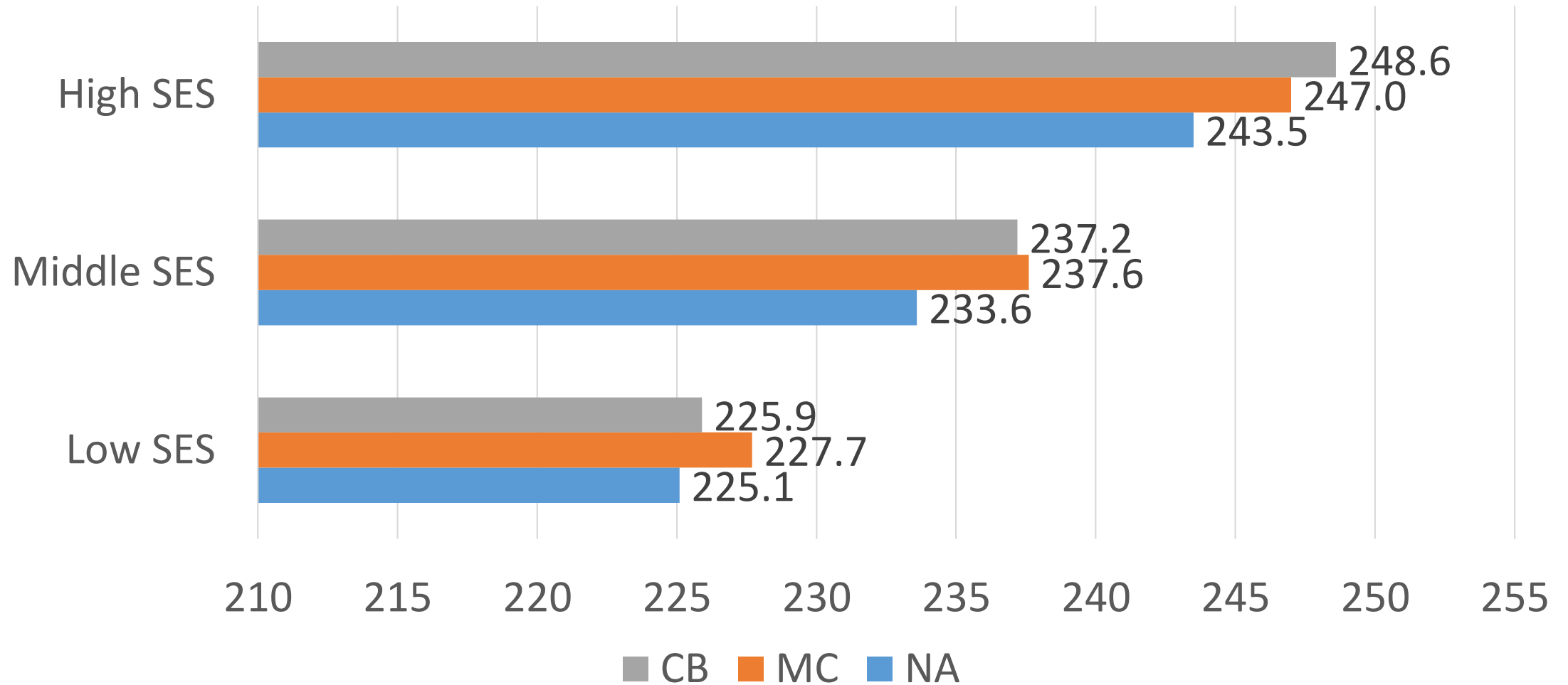
- District-level measures of union presence from School and Staffing Survey (SASS). Three categories:
 - Collectively bargained contract in place (CB)
 - “Meet and Confer” agreement in place (MC)
 - Neither a CB nor a MC agreement in place (NA)



Math Scores by SES and Union Status



English Scores by SES and Union Status



Selected Characteristics of Districts by Class

	Low SES	Mid SES	High SES
% CB	44.9	63.3	74.6
% MC	10.1	12.7	12.0
% NA	45.0	24.0	13.4
Poverty Rate	28.0	13.5	5.1
Median HH Income	\$38,594	\$57,913	\$92,757
Unemployment Rate	6.1	4.3	3.1
Female Headship	35.3	22.2	14.7
% College Grads	16.2	21.9	40.0



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Differences by Union Status Within Class

Within each SES class, CB and MC districts

- Serve more white/fewer African American students
- Have higher revenue per pupil
- Have fewer students on free/reduced price lunch programs

than do NA districts.



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After adjusting for school and community characteristics, we find

- CB status is associated with higher test scores for both Math and English in mid-SES districts, and MC status is associated with higher English scores in these districts.
- MC status may be associated with higher scores in low-SES districts (some 0 effects, some positive).
- CB and MC status are not associated with higher (or lower) scores in high-SES districts.



How might we interpret our “class” and MC results?

- The marginal benefit of union presence may be smaller in districts that are otherwise well resourced.
- Teacher “voice/engagement” effects may be most visible where resources are not abundant but also not too scarce.



Implications?

- For research on unions:
 - Studies that don't account for positive union effects even in the absence of a formal contract may understate union impacts.
- For inequality, mobility, and the middle class:
 - Weakening teachers' unions may widen school achievement differentials between high- and middle or low-SES districts.
 - In the post-Janus era, it may be valuable to support institutional structures that provide teachers with voice and engagement even if formal union arrangements aren't achieved.

