

Primary-school enrollment, attendance, and completion: an empirical investigation using Italian archival sources from the 1880's.

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Abstract

We study the school enrollment decisions of the parents of primary school-aged boys residing in a medium-sized Italian municipality as of the year 1880. By linking school registers to contemporaneous census data we are able to identify the boys that are enrolled in school and those who are not. This provides a direct and rich description of compliance with the existing compulsory schooling laws. We find strong evidence of delayed school entry and rates of non-compliance between 30% and 40% for boys aged 7 to 10. Next, we decompose the variation in compliance between variation across families and variation within families (across siblings). The analysis reveals that 28% of the total (unconditional) variance is across family variation suggesting that to understand schooling rates family-level data does not suffice. Decompositions conditional on, for instance, the literacy of the boy's father or the income bracket of the boy's household, confirm this conclusion.

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