



Learning Frontiers
PreK to Grade 3

Family-School Partnerships during the Transition into Kindergarten: Does Geography Matter?

Rachel E. Schumacher, MA

Hannah M. Kerby, MA

Susan M. Sheridan, PhD

Amanda L. Witte, PhD

Natalie Koziol, PhD

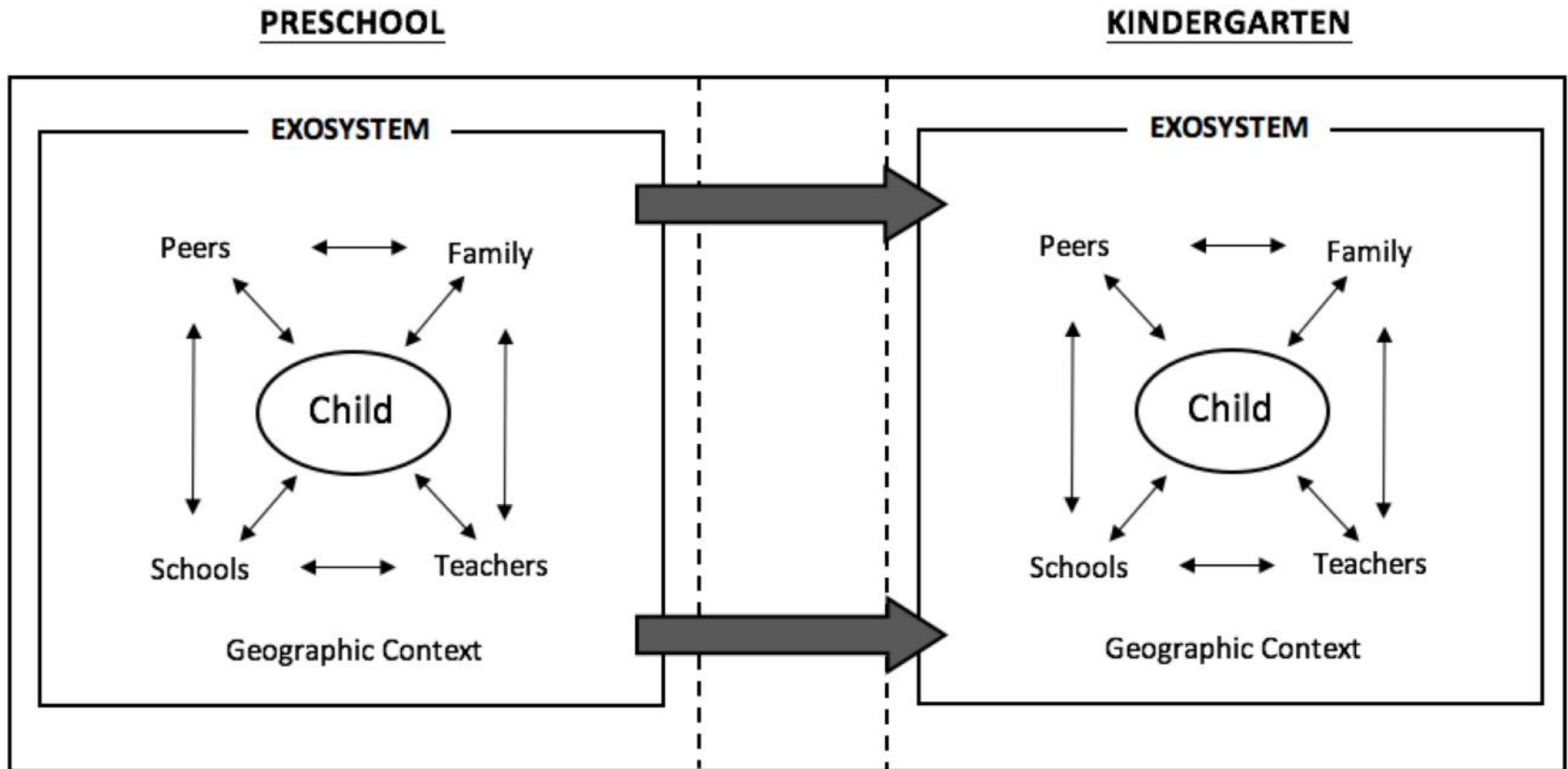
Lisa L. Knoche, PhD

Transition to Kindergarten

- A sensitive period that has lasting impacts on children’s development and outcomes
- Sets the foundation for a child’s future school performance, as well as families’ relationships with the educational system (Malsch et al., 2011; Schulting et al., 2005)
- Children who are “school-ready” in kindergarten are more likely to remain on a positive educational trajectory (e.g., Duncan et al., 2007)
- A difficult transition is associated with adjustment problems (e.g., Margetts et al., 2009)
 - Children who start off school behind are unlikely to catch up to more successful students and may even continue to fall further behind (e.g., McClelland et al., 2006)



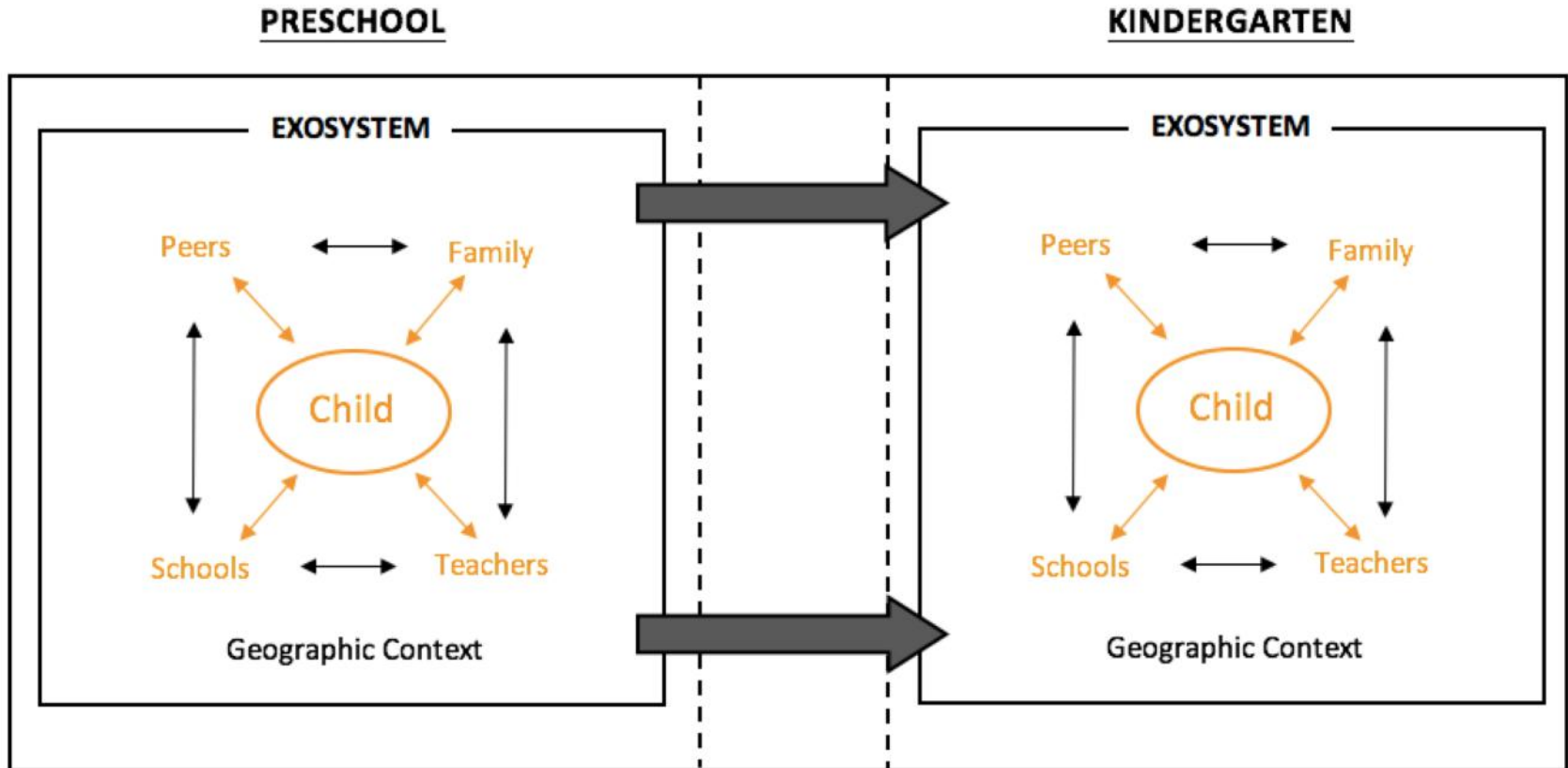
An Ecological Perspective



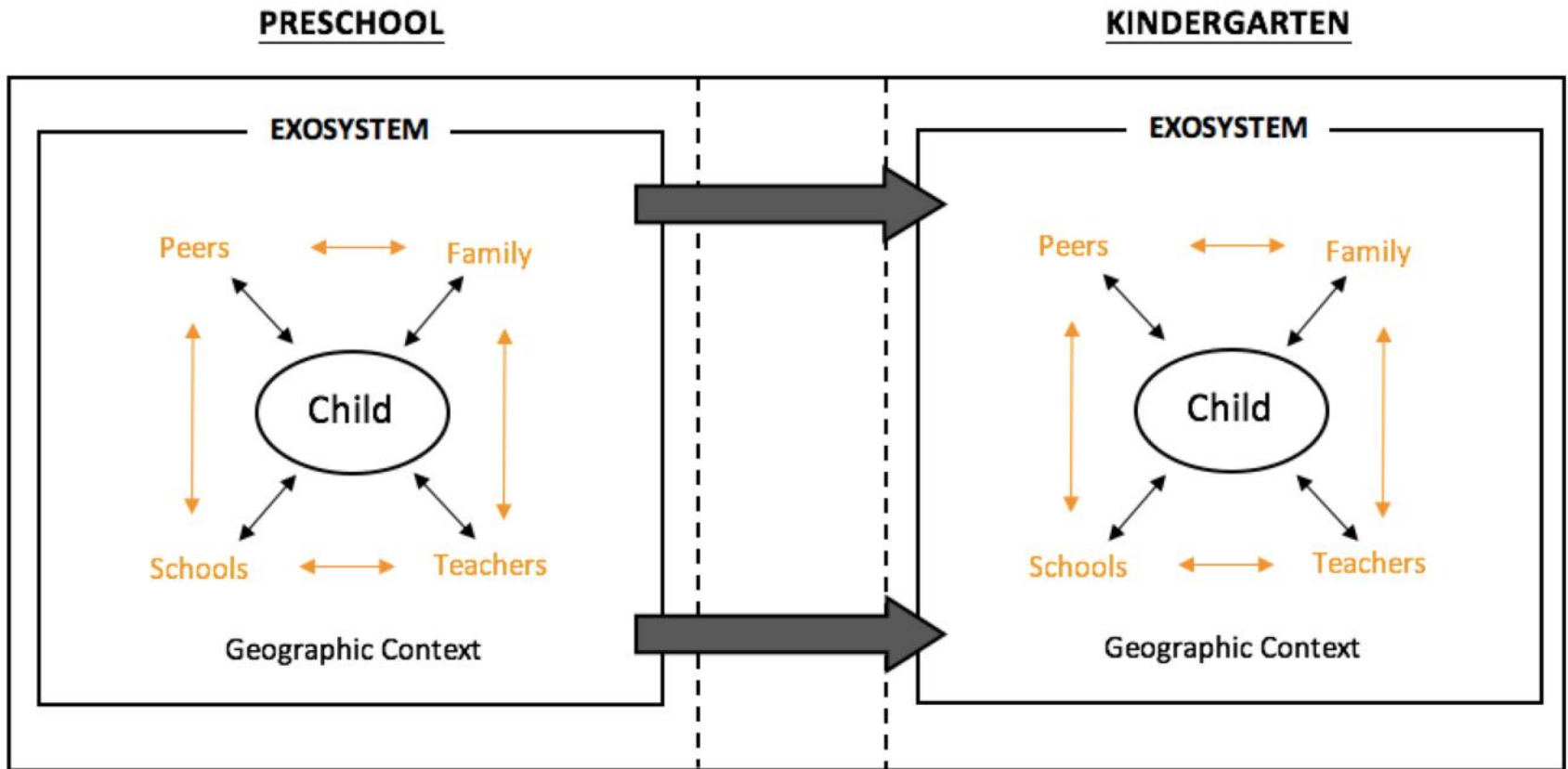
Adapted from *Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000*



An Ecological Perspective



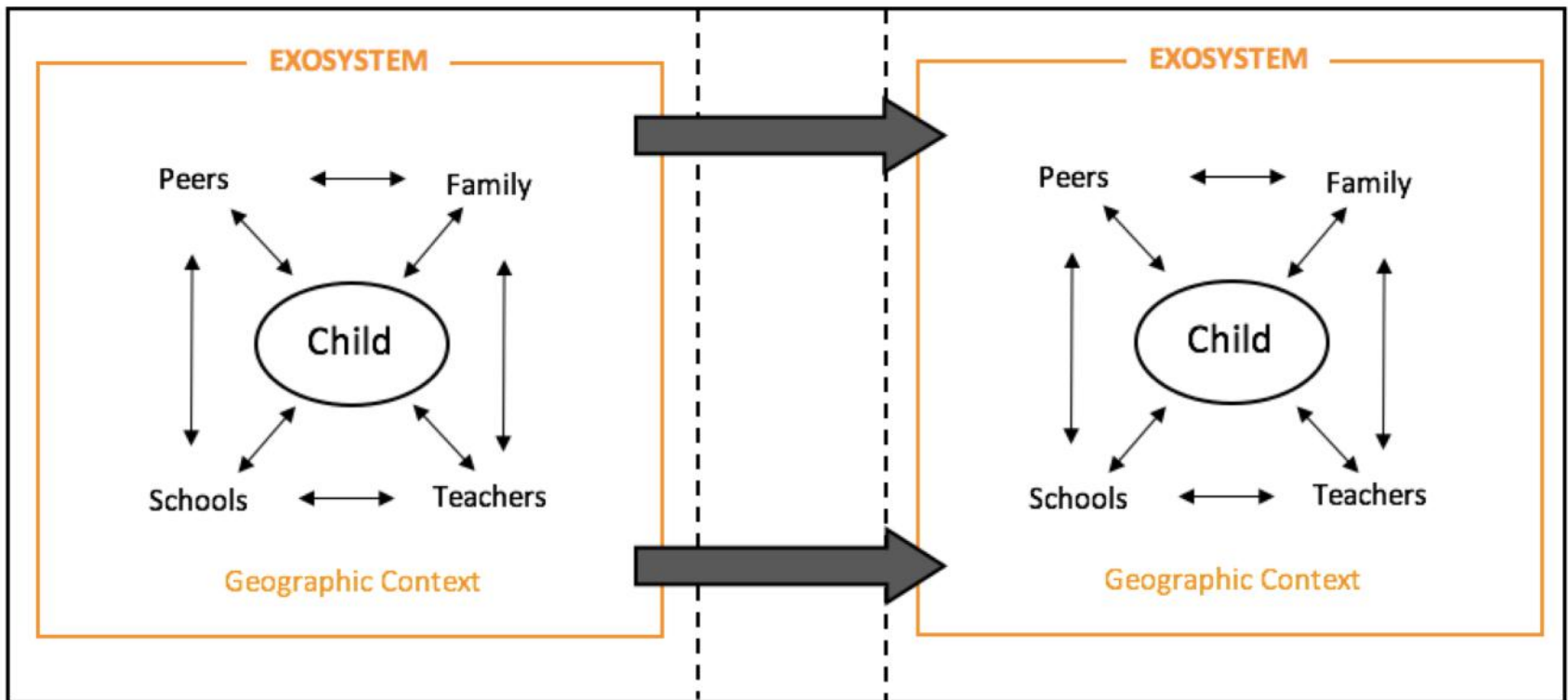
An Ecological Perspective



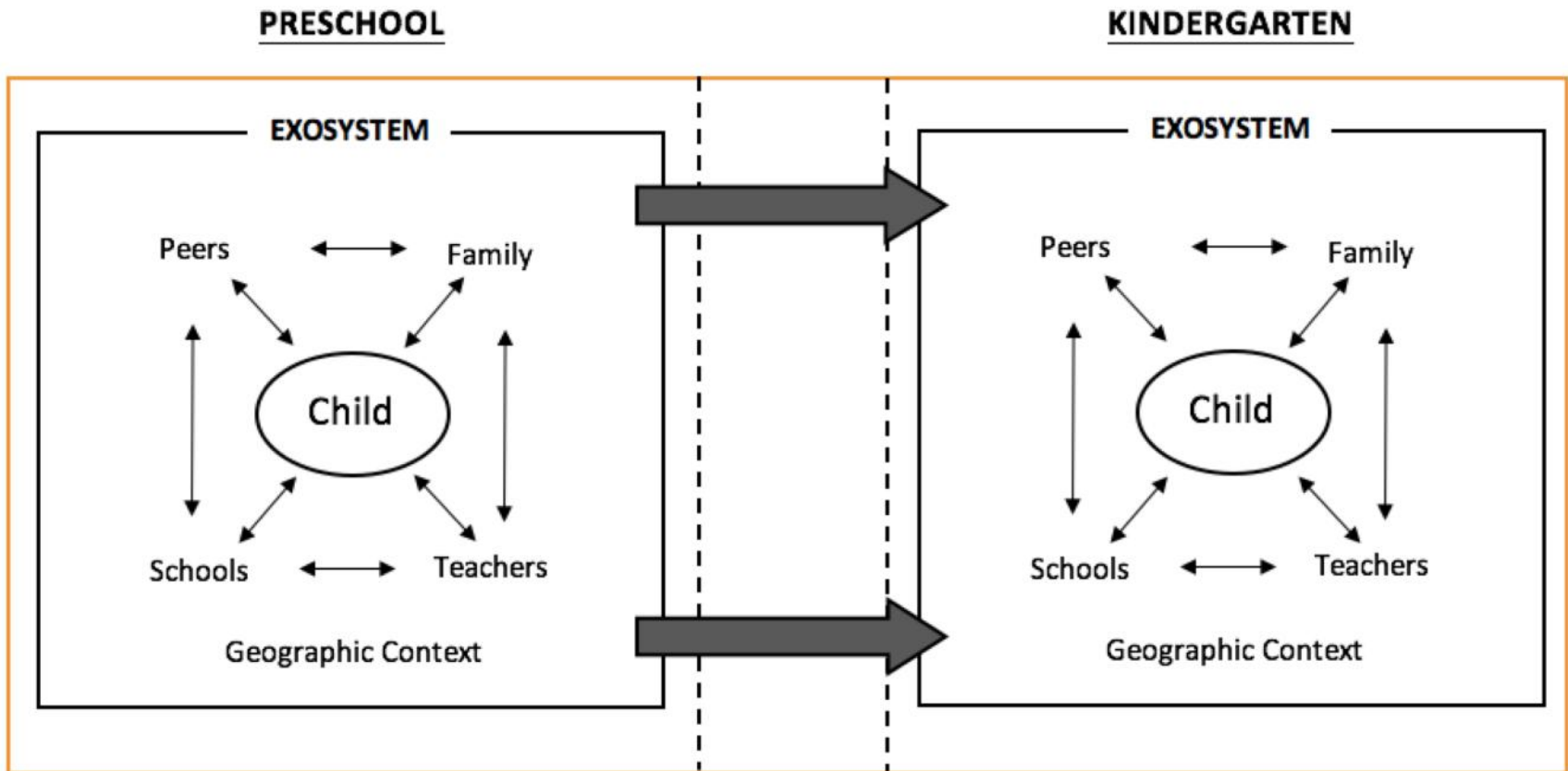
An Ecological Perspective

PRESCHOOL

KINDERGARTEN



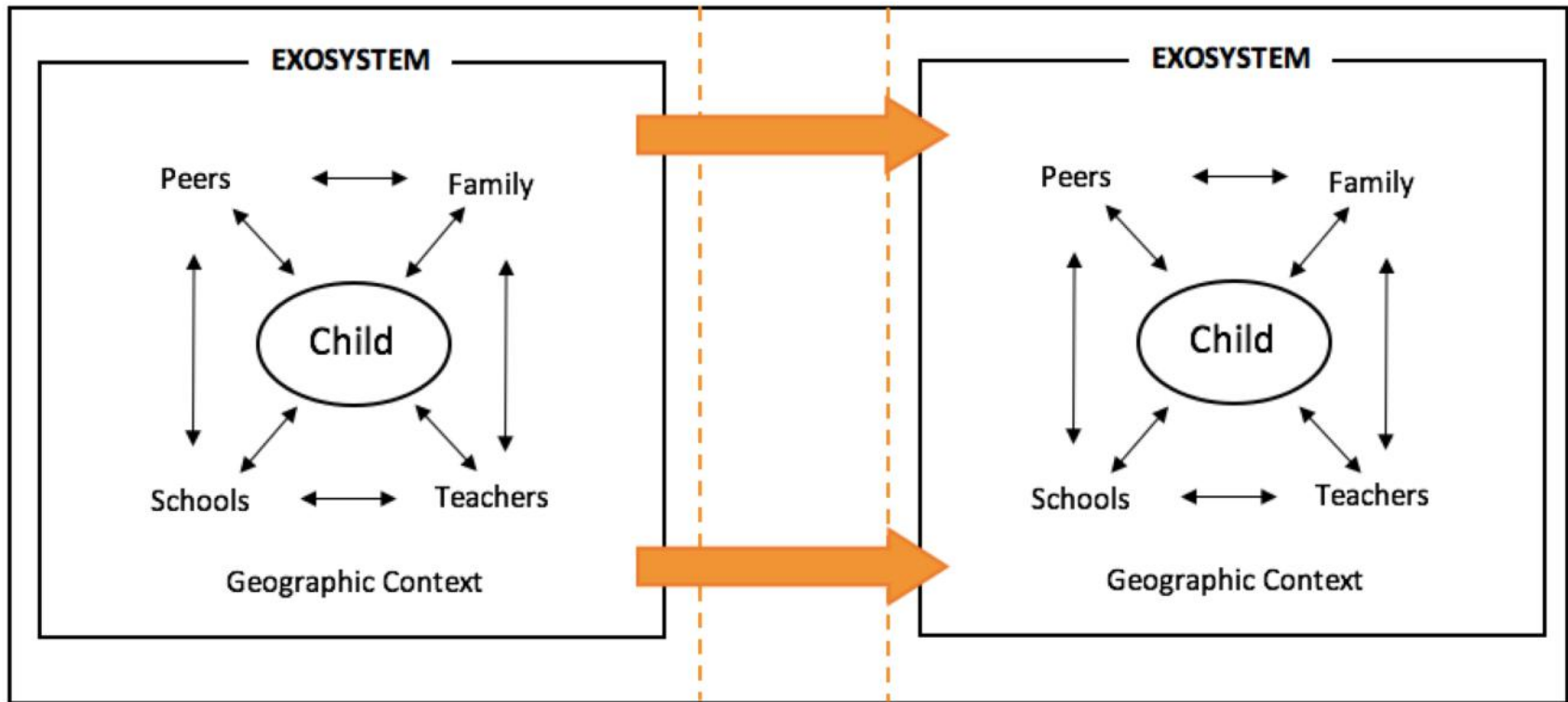
An Ecological Perspective



An Ecological Perspective

PRESCHOOL

KINDERGARTEN



Home-Based Involvement

Active promotion of a learning environment at home (e.g., educational resources)



School-Based Involvement

Activities and behaviors parents engage in at school (e.g., volunteering in classroom)



Parent-Teacher Relationship

Structural and relational communication between parents and teachers

Dimensions of Family-School Partnerships



Why are Family-School Partnerships Important?

Home-Based Involvement

- Associated with children's early vocabulary, literacy, and math skills (Hindman & Morrison, 2012; Manolitsis et al., 2013), self-regulation (Hindman & Morrison, 2012), and social-behavioral skills (Sheridan et al., 2019)

School-Based Involvement

- Associated with positive social skills (Powell et al., 2010), fewer problem behaviors (Powell et al., 2010), and improved reading and math achievement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012)

Parent-Teacher Relationship

- Associated with children's academic and social-behavioral outcomes (Elicker et al., 2013), parents' engagement in school activities (Powell et al., 2010), and teachers' use of effective strategies (Sheridan et al., 2018)

Family-School Partnerships During the Transition

- A new *mesosystem* is created when children transition to kindergarten (i.e., *chronosystem*)
- The “home learning environment” seems to improve across preschool years, but decrease in kindergarten (Powell et al., 2012; Son & Morrison, 2010)
- Mixed research on parents’ participation in school-based activities in kindergarten (Fantuzzo et al., 2000; Murray et al., 2015)
- Dramatic decrease in parent-teacher communication in kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005)



The Role of Geography

- Few studies have considered the impact of geographic context on family-school partnerships during the transition into Kindergarten
- Geography is an *exosystemic* context which likely influences the development and implementation of family-school partnerships
- Rural communities substantially differ from urban communities



Advantages for Rural Family-School Partnerships

- More personal, close-knit social relationships (Beloin & Peterson, 2000)
- Stronger sense of community in rural settings (Osborn, 2012)
- Rural children are more likely than urban children to live in two-parent families (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010)
- Smaller school enrollment (Nelson, 2010)
- More stable teacher workforce (Loveless, 2003)



Barriers to Rural Family-School Partnerships

- Lower levels of parent/adult education (Johnson, 2002)
- Higher rates of poverty (Rivers, 2005)
- Isolation and limited access to schools and support services (Beede & Neville, 2013)
- Increased distance from homes to schools (Phillips et al., 2007)
- Lack of highly qualified staff with expertise in parent engagement (Hammer et al., 2005)
- Susceptible to the negative impact of stigma (Beloin & Peterson, 2000; Owens et al., 2007)



Our Purpose

To examine the intersection of family-school partnerships and geography across the transition to kindergarten and the influence on children's outcomes.



Research Questions

1

How do family-school partnerships change across the transition from preschool to kindergarten in urban versus rural settings?

2

Are family-school partnerships related to children's academic and behavioral outcomes in kindergarten, and does this relationship differ in urban and rural communities?



Participants

	Urban (n = 135)	Rural (n = 117)	Total (n = 252)
Child Race/Ethnicity			
White/Non-Hispanic	24.8%	71.3%	46.7%
Hispanic	29.8%	22.2%	26.2%
Black/Non-Hispanic	27.3%	0.0%	14.4%
Other, non-Hispanic	18.2%	6.5%	12.7%
Primary Home Language			
Only English	70.2%	88.8%	78.8%
Other	29.8%	11.2%	21.2%
Parent Education			
< HS Diploma	24.0%	7.4%	16.3%
HS diploma/GED	26.4%	23.2%	24.9%
Some college or 2-year degree	44.0%	41.7%	42.9%
4-year degree +	5.6%	27.8%	15.9%
Income Status			
≥ 150% FPL and no government assistance	18.9%	49.5%	33.2%
≤ 150% FPL and/or some government assistance	81.2%	50.5%	66.8%

Teacher Participants

Grade Level	
PreK	N = 65
Kindergarten	N = 121
Gender	
Female	99%
Race/Ethnicity	
White/Non-Hispanic	89%
Hispanic	5%
Black/Non-Hispanic	1%
Other, non-Hispanic	5%
Education	
Bachelor's Degree	57%
Master's Degree	37%
Years of Experience	
More than 10 years	47%
5-10 years	28%
Fewer than 5 years	25%

Setting

	PreK	Kindergarten
Classrooms	65 Total 39 Urban 26 Rural	121 Total 74 Urban 47 Rural
Schools	37 Total 22 Urban 15 Rural	68 Total 40 Urban 28 Rural
Districts	12 Total 2 Urban 10 Rural	23 Total 7 Urban 16 Rural



Community Demographics

	PreK		Kindergarten	
	Urban (n = 2)	Rural (n = 10)	Urban (n = 2)	Rural (n = 16)
Population	<i>M</i> = 375,814 Min = 264,736 Max = 466,893	<i>M</i> = 8,467 Min = 873 Max = 33,835	<i>M</i> = 375,814 Min = 264,736 Max = 466,893	<i>M</i> = 6,994 Min = 707 Max = 33,835
County-Level Median Household Income	<i>M</i> = \$57,193 Min = \$55, 747 Max = \$58,640	<i>M</i> = \$48,281 Min = \$41,209 Max = \$58,679	<i>M</i> = \$57,193 Min = \$55, 747 Max = \$58,640	<i>M</i> = \$49,855 Min = \$41,209 Max = \$63,667
County-Level Percentage of Families Below Poverty Level	<i>M</i> = 9.05% Min = 8.7% Max = 9.4%	<i>M</i> = 8.2% Min = 4.2% Max = 12.8%	<i>M</i> = 9.05% Min = 8.7% Max = 9.4%	<i>M</i> = 8.2% Min = 4.2% Max = 12.8%



Measures

- Family-school partnerships were assessed in preschool (fall and spring) and kindergarten (spring)
- Family Involvement Questionnaire (Fantuzzo et al., 2000) assessed the nature and extent of parent involvement in their child's education
 - Home-based involvement
 - School-based involvement
 - Home-school conferencing (Structural communication)
- Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale (PTRS, Vickers & Minke, 1995) measured parent perceptions of their relationship with each their child's teacher
 - Communication-to-other (Relational communication)



Measures

- Child outcomes were collected in the spring of their kindergarten year
- Achievement outcomes were directly assessed using the Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement - Third Edition (WJ-III; Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001) and the Expressive Vocabulary Test - Second Edition (EVT-2; Williams, 2007)
 - Broad Reading
 - Broad Math
 - Expressive Vocabulary
- Social-emotional outcomes were indirectly assessed via the Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scale (SSIS; Gresham & Elliott, 2009) completed by teachers
 - Social Skills
 - Problem Behaviors



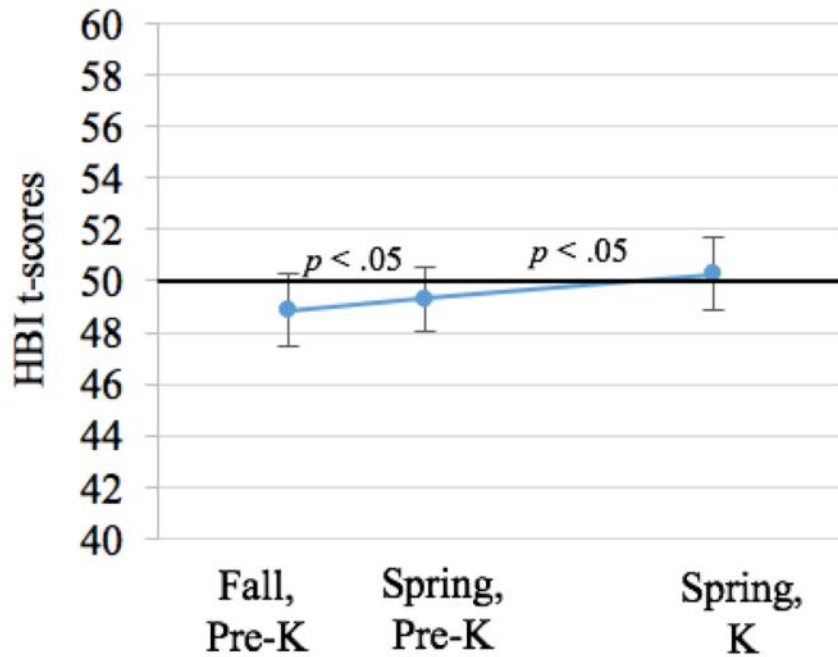
Results: Research Question 1

How do family-school partnerships change across the transition from preschool to kindergarten in urban versus rural settings?

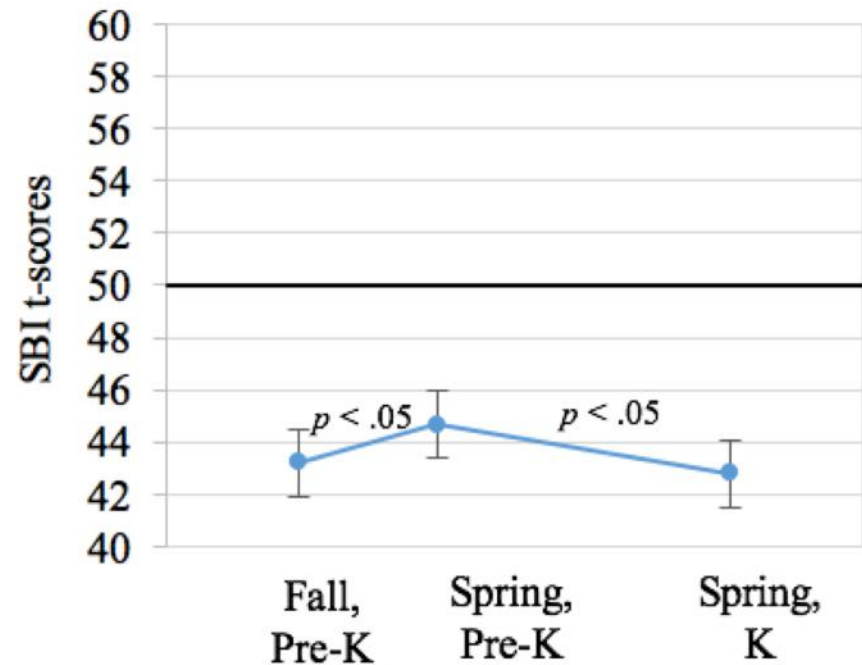


Trajectories of Family-School Partnerships: PreK to Kindergarten

Home-based Involvement
(e.g., learning activities at home)

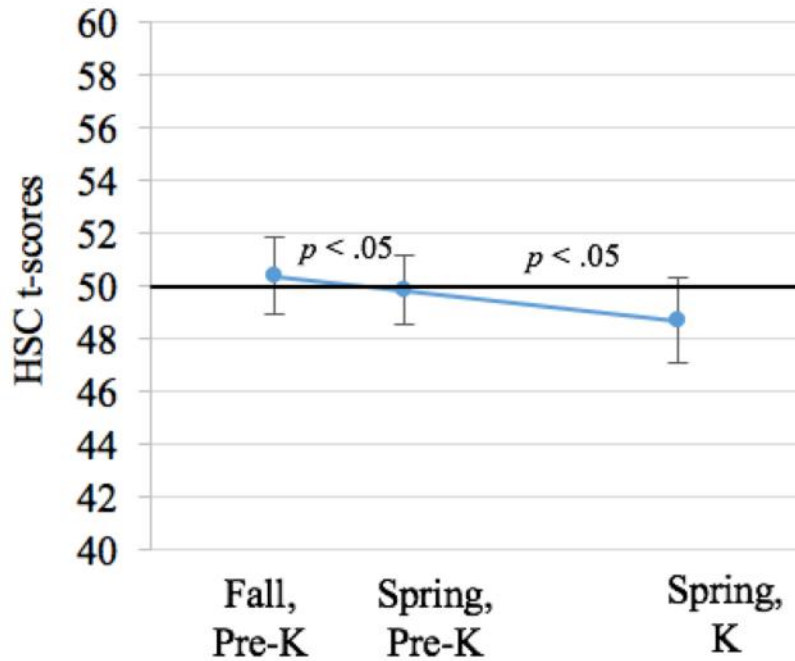


School-based Involvement
(e.g., participation in school-offered events)

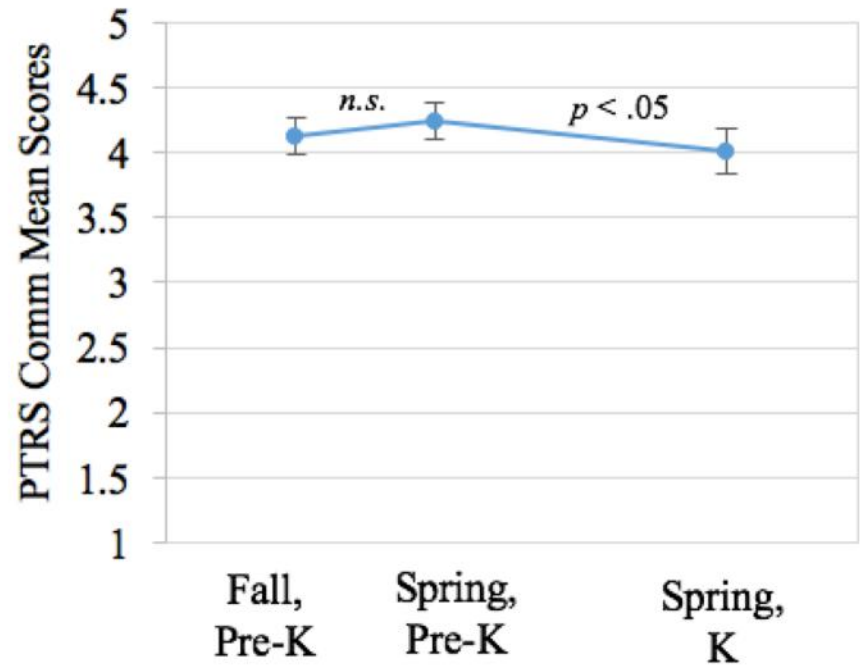


Trajectories of Family-School Partnerships: PreK to Kindergarten

Structural Communication
(e.g., basic information exchange)

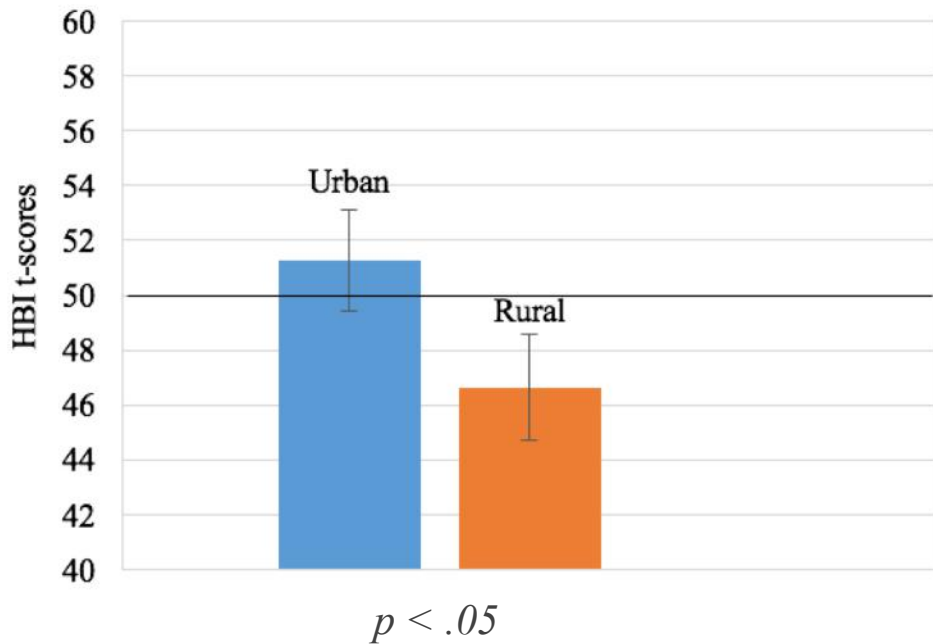


Relational Communication
(e.g., partnership-focused communication)

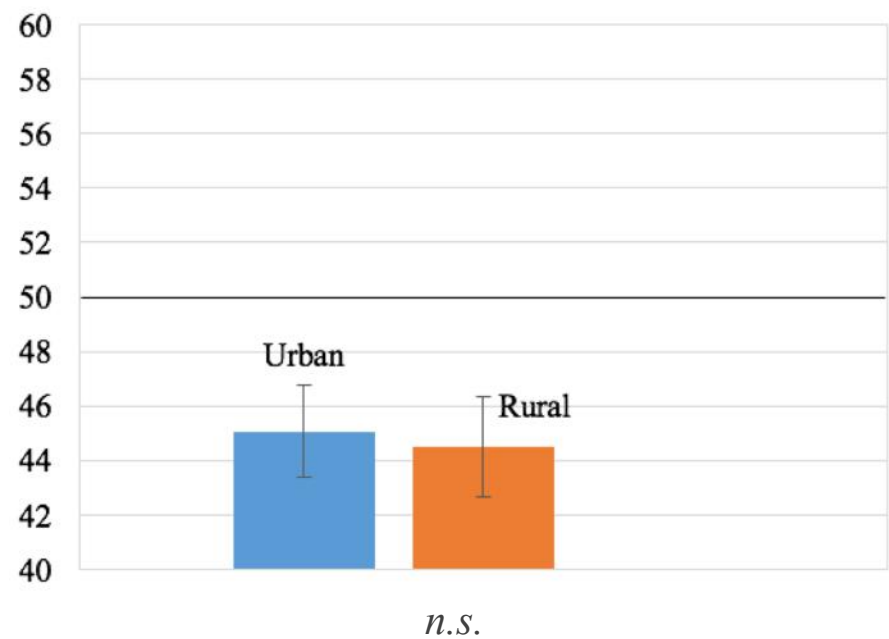


Family-School Partnerships: Rural vs. Urban

Home-based Involvement (e.g., learning activities at home)

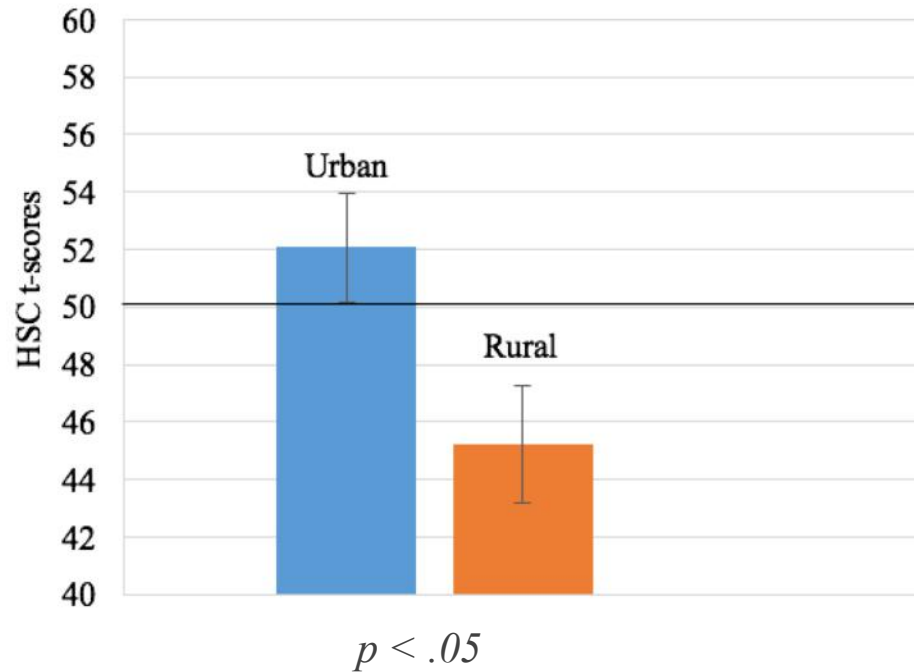


School-based Involvement (e.g., participation in school-offered events)

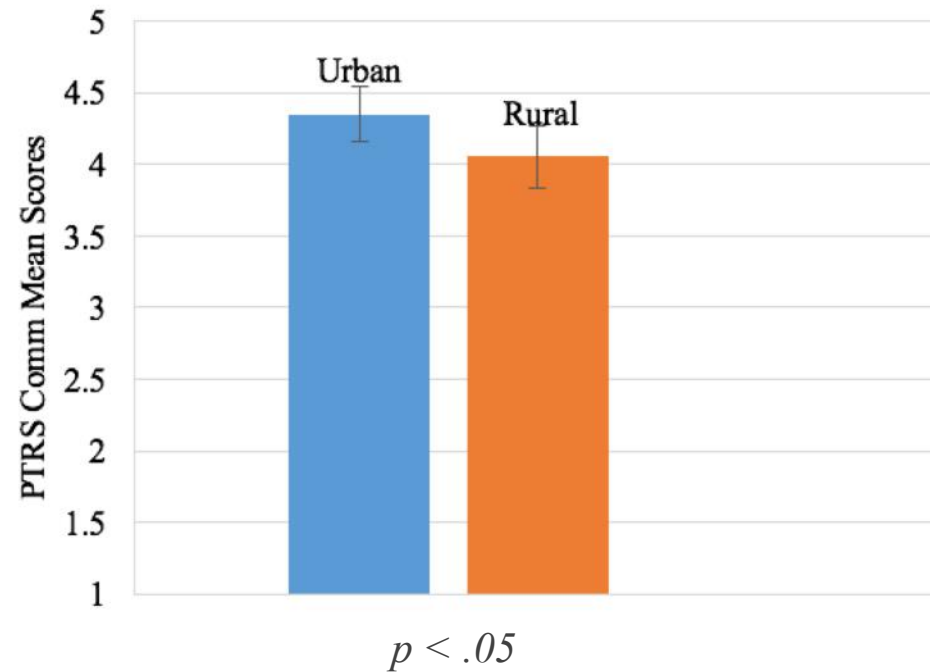


Family-School Partnerships: Rural vs. Urban

Structural Communication
(e.g., basic information exchange)

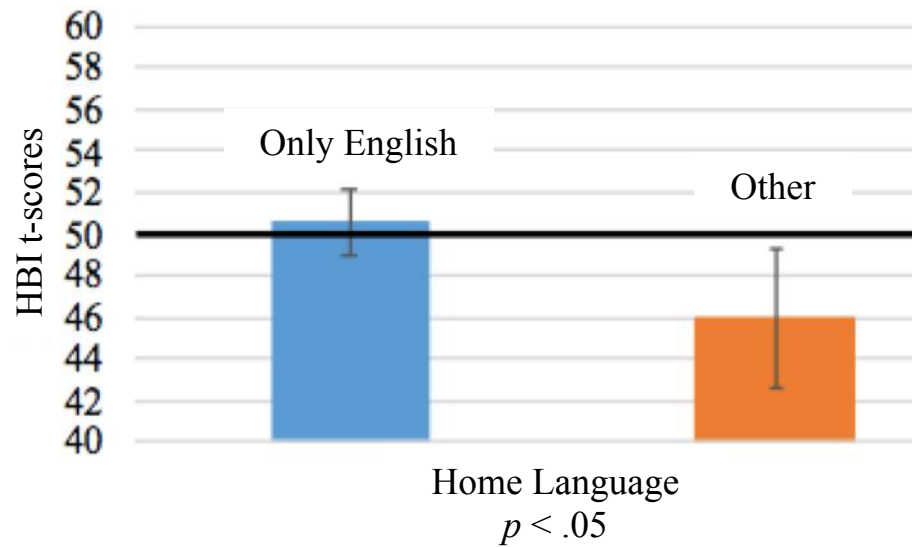


Relational Communication
(e.g., partnership-focused communication)

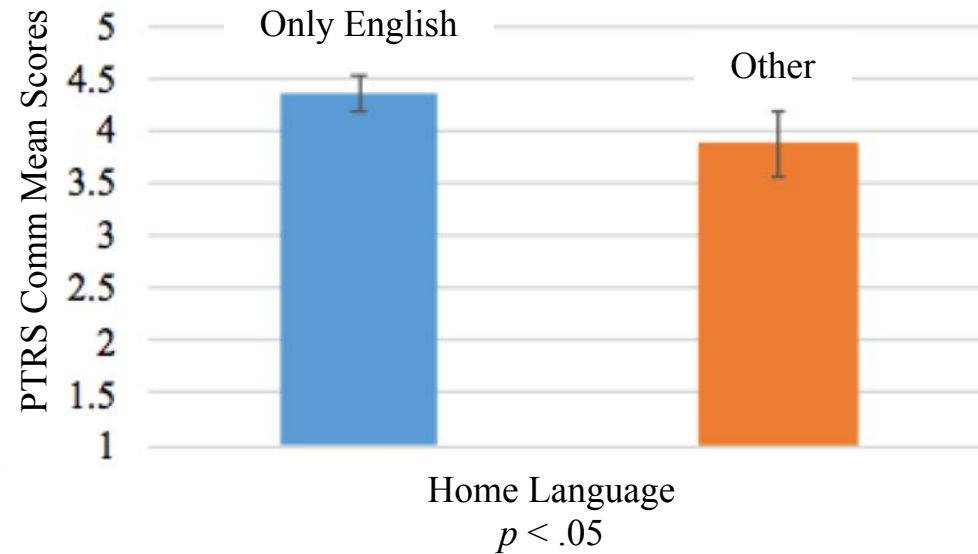


Family-School Partnerships: Home Factors

Home-based Involvement
(e.g., learning activities at home)



Relational Communication
(e.g., partnership-focused communication)



Results: Research Question 2

Are family-school partnerships related to children's academic and behavioral outcomes in kindergarten, and does this relationship differ for urban and rural communities?



Linking Family-School Partnerships to Children's Kindergarten Outcomes

Higher levels of *structural communication*



Lower math, reading,
and vocabulary scores

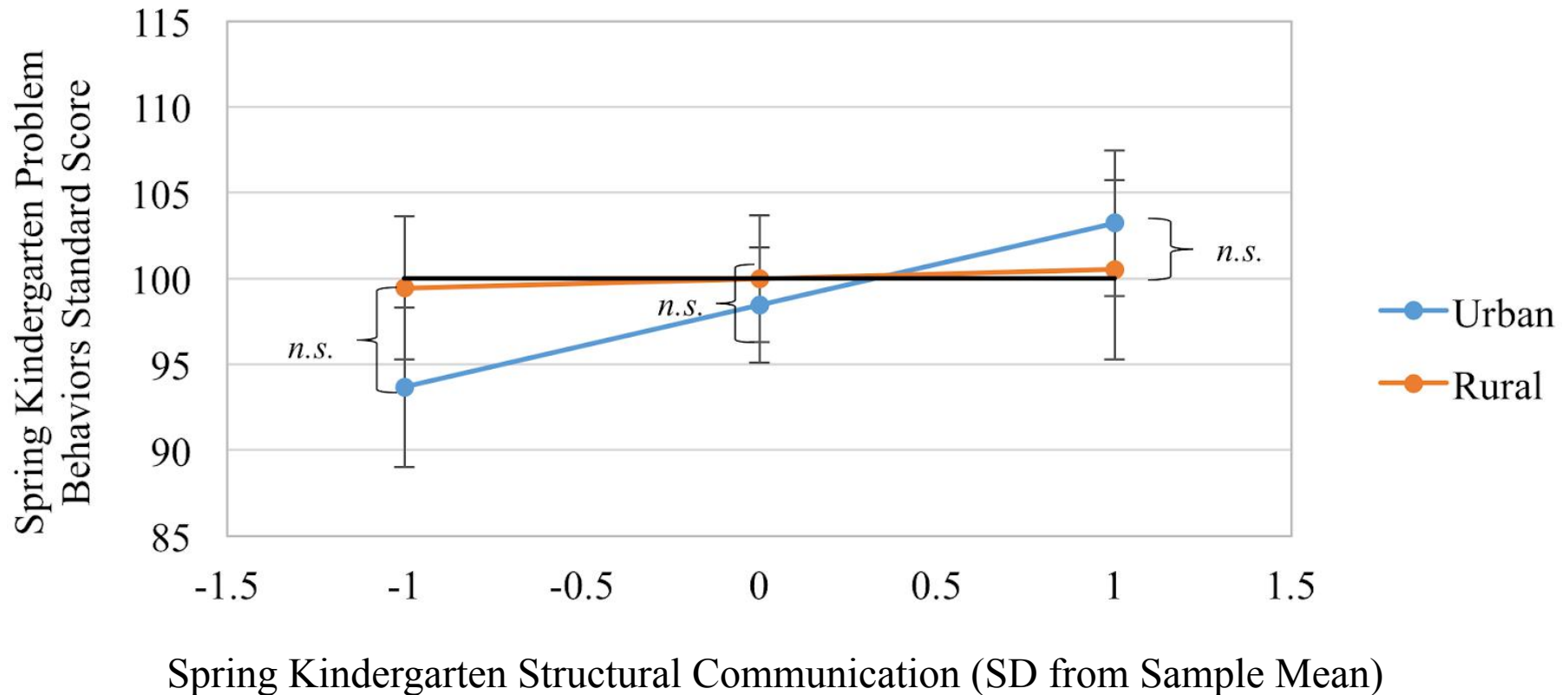


More problem behaviors

No significant findings were found for other dimensions of family-school partnerships (i.e., home-based involvement, school-based involvement, relational communication between teachers and parents)



Structural Communication and Problem Behaviors: Urban vs. Rural



Discussion & Implications



Changes in Family-School Partnerships

Patterns of change are somewhat consistent with past research

- Home-based involvement *increased* from preschool through kindergarten
- Structural communication *decreased* from preschool through kindergarten
- School-based involvement and relational communication *increased* through preschool, but *decreased* in kindergarten

Changes in program structure and expectations as the child starts kindergarten may contribute to changes in family-school partnerships

- Greater emphasis on academic skills
- Class sizes increase and teacher-child ratios decrease
- Frequency of home-school contacts decreases

Urban and Rural Differences

- Across the transition from pre-K to kindergarten, when compared to urban parents, rural parents...
 - Report significantly *less home-based involvement*
 - Report significantly *less structural communication*
 - Report significantly *less relational communication*
 - Report *similar levels of school-based involvement*
- Barriers in rural communities may prevent parents from providing stimulating learning experiences at home
- Rural and urban parents may have different perceptions of their roles in their children's early education



Impact of Contextual Home Factors

- Home-language status (English vs. non-English) negatively impacted parents' home-based involvement and relational communication with teachers
- Immigrant and culturally diverse families often face many challenges, including language barriers and poverty
 - May limit parents' time and resources to provide home-based educational activities (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011)
 - Cultural differences may make it difficult for parents to form relationships with teachers and to understand the opportunities available to them (Dyson, 2001)



Family-School Partnerships & Child Outcomes

- There were very few significant associations between family-school partnerships and child outcomes
 - If family-school partnerships continue to decrease across elementary school, there may be more implications for children's outcomes
- Structural communication between home and school was associated with higher levels of problem behavior and lower academic performance
 - The effect was statistically more positive in urban communities
 - Communication between home and school appears to be focused on problem behaviors and poor academic performance



Implications for Practice

- Ensuring school readiness for all children is a national priority
- The decrease in family-school communication has implications for fostering school success for children identified as at risk for school failure
 - Rural children are already at a greater risk for school failure at kindergarten entry
- Family-school partnerships often reflect program priorities and policies
- School psychologists can help foster more effective partnerships between families and schools in both urban and rural settings



Tips to “Partnerize” your School

1

Form relationships

2

Create ways to become and stay engaged

3

Communicate two ways

4

Structure consistent opportunities for learning and behavior

5

Collaborate to achieve goals and solve problems





Learning Frontiers
PreK to Grade 3

Thank you!

The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant #R305N160016 to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.