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

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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)
  o 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

PRE-SCHOOL

Child

Family

Teachers

Schools

EXOSYSTEM

Geographic Context

KINDERGARTEN

Child

Family

Teachers

Schools

EXOSYSTEM

Geographic Context
An Ecological Perspective

**Preschool**
- **Exosystem**
  - Peers
  - Family
  - Schools
  - Teachers
  - Geographic Context

**Kindergarten**
- **Exosystem**
  - Peers
  - Family
  - Schools
  - Teachers
  - Geographic Context
An Ecological Perspective

Diagram showing the relationships between Child, Peers, Family, Schools, Teachers, and Geographic Context in Preschool and Kindergarten.
Dimensions of Family-School Partnerships

**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
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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PreK</td>
<td>N = 65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>N = 121</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>99%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black/Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>57%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>37%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 5 years</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PreK</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classrooms</strong></td>
<td>65 Total</td>
<td>121 Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39 Urban</td>
<td>74 Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26 Rural</td>
<td>47 Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools</strong></td>
<td>37 Total</td>
<td>68 Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 Urban</td>
<td>40 Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 Rural</td>
<td>28 Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Districts</strong></td>
<td>12 Total</td>
<td>23 Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Urban</td>
<td>7 Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 Rural</td>
<td>16 Rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Community Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PreK</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban (n = 2)</td>
<td>Rural (n = 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M = 375,814</td>
<td>M = 8,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Min = 264,736</td>
<td>Min = 873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Max = 466,893</td>
<td>Max = 33,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County-Level Median</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>M = $57,193</td>
<td>M = $48,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Min = $55,747</td>
<td>Min = $41,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Max = $58,640</td>
<td>Max = $58,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County-Level Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Families Below Poverty Level</td>
<td>M = 9.05%</td>
<td>M = 8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Min = 8.7%</td>
<td>Min = 4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Max = 9.4%</td>
<td>Max = 12.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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)
  o Broad Reading
  o Broad Math
  o Expressive Vocabulary

• Social-emotional outcomes were indirectly assessed via the Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scale (SSIS; Gresham & Elliott, 2009) completed by teachers
  o Social Skills
  o 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)

$p < .05$

$n.s.$
Family-School Partnerships: Rural vs. Urban

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

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

\[ p < .05 \]
Family-School Partnerships: Home Factors

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

- Only English: 48
- Other: 42

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

- Only English: 4.5
- Other: 2.5

*Home Language p < .05*
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

Spring Kindergarten Problem Behaviors Standard Score

Spring Kindergarten Structural Communication (SD from Sample Mean)
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
  o 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
  o The effect was statistically more positive in urban communities
  o 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
  o 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
Thank you!

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