



Learning Frontiers
PreK to Grade 3

Family Engagement in Rural and Urban Nebraska

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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 Engagement

Why Family Engagement?

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

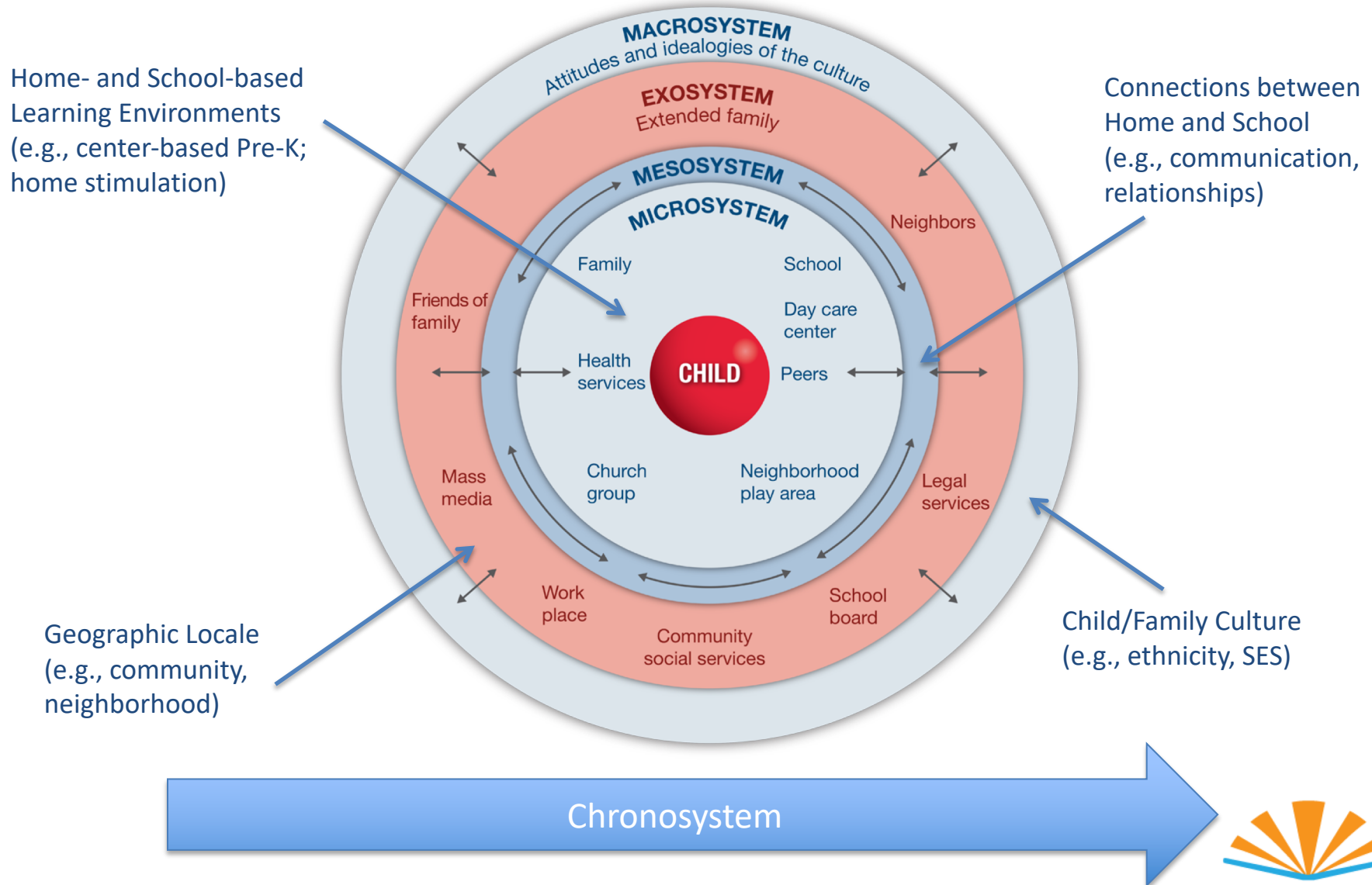
- Associated with children's academic and social-behavioral outcomes (Elicker et al., 2013), parents' engagement in school activities (Powell et al., 2010), and teachers' use of effective strategies (Sheridan et al., 2018)

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)
- 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)



Factors Influencing Young Children's Learning



Ecological Factors Influencing Learning

- Few studies have considered the impact of geographic context (*exosystem*) on home- and school-based involvement (*microsystem*), family-school relationships (*mesosystem*) during the transition into Kindergarten (*chronosystem*)
- Rural communities differ substantially from urban communities in size, access, context
- *Macrosystem* factors (e.g., race, culture) may influence engagement and relationships



Research Questions

- How do *family engagement and parent-teacher relationships change* from entry into preschool through the Kindergarten year?
- Are there differences for children in *rural and urban* Nebraska?



Parent Demographics (N = 248)

Race/Ethnicity	Rural (%) <i>n</i> =116	Urban (%) <i>n</i> =132
Black	0.0	30.3
Hispanic/Latino	20.7	27.3
White/Non-Hispanic	75.9	33.3
Other	3.5	9.1
Primary Home Language		
Only English	86.2	67.4
Other	13.8	32.6
Education (Highest Degree)		
< HS diploma	5.2	18.9
HS diploma/GED	25.0	28.0
Some college or 2 year degree	39.7	46.2
≥ 4 year degree	30.2	6.8
Income Status		
> 150% FPL & no support	35.3	13.6
≤ 150% FPL &/or govt support	64.7	86.4

Measures

Family Involvement Questionnaire (Parent Report)

- $M = 50$; $SD = 10$
- 3 factors: *Home-based Involvement, School-based Involvement, Structural Communication*
- 36 items rated on 4-point Likert (frequency) scale
- Alphas = .87-.88 (HBI), .79-.86 (SBI), .87-.90 (SC)

Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale (Parent Report)

- 2 factors: Joining, *Relational Communication*, Total
- 24 items rated on 5-point Likert (frequency) scale
- Alphas = .84-.89 (RC)



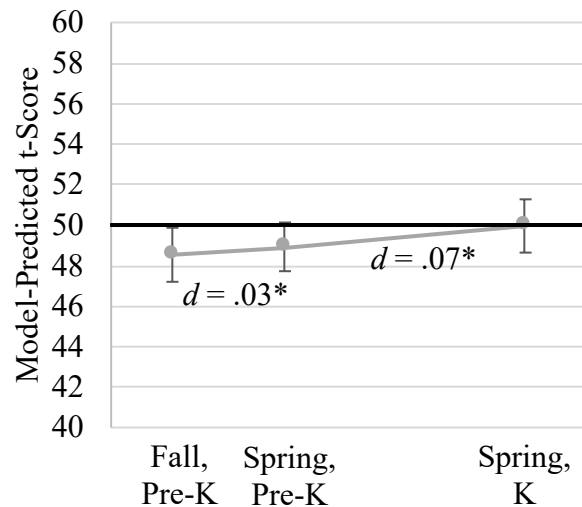
Analytic Approach

- Cross-classified multilevel modeling accounted for repeated observations nested within children, and children changing classrooms/schools from Pre-K to Kindergarten
- Models controlled for poverty/low income status, parent education, home language, parent race/ethnicity

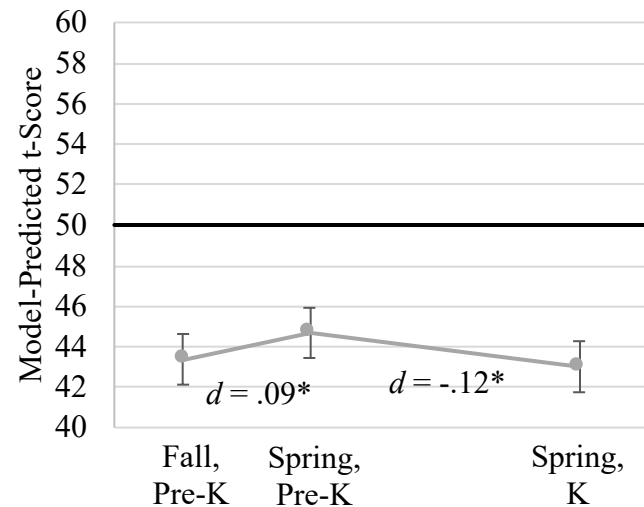


Trajectories of Family Engagement: Home/School-based Involvement (Microsystems)

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



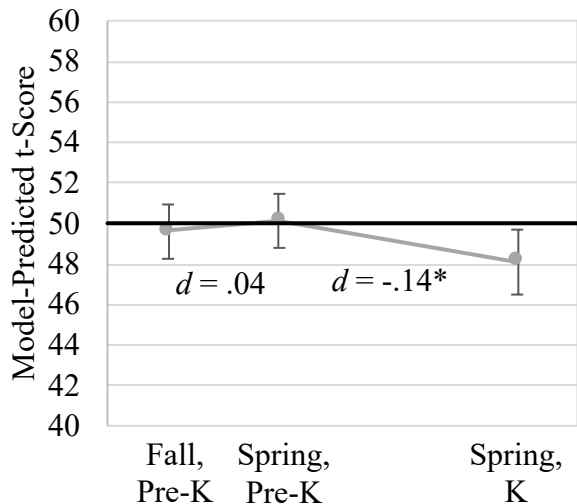
School-based Involvement (e.g., participation in school-offered events)



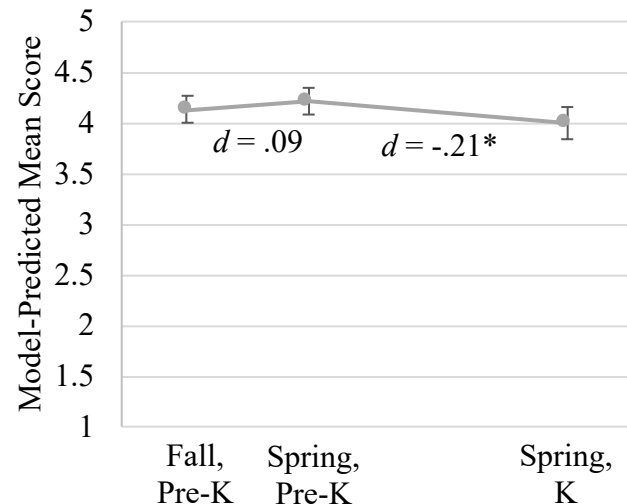
d = Cohen's d for main effect of time, averaging across geographic setting (time \times setting interaction *n.s.*
* $p < .05$ for time main effect.

Trajectories of Family-School Relationships (Mesosystems)

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



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



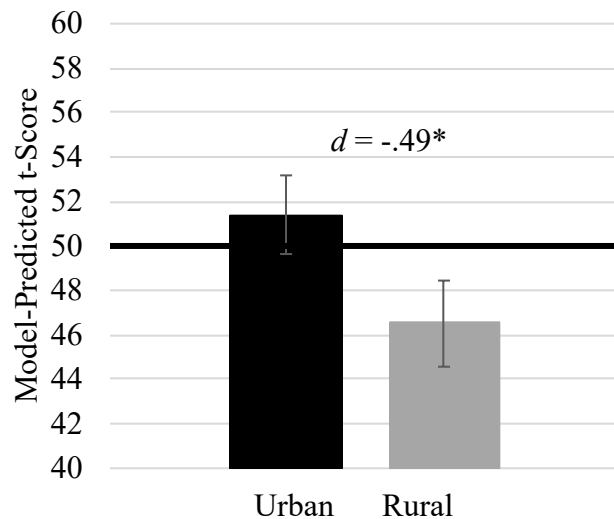
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Rural v. Urban Family Engagement (Exosystems)

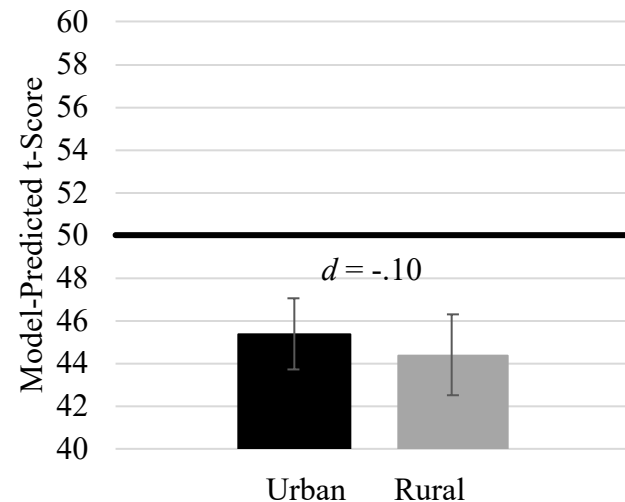
Home-based Involvement

(e.g., learning activities at home)



School-based Involvement

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

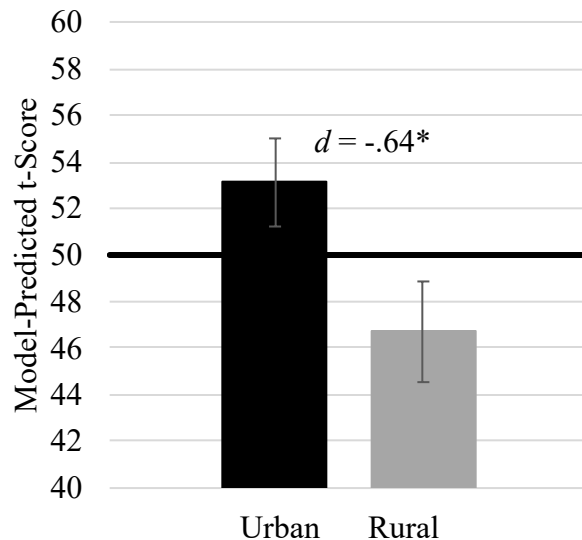


Model predicted family engagement scores and 95% confidence intervals by geographic setting, averaging across time (time X setting interaction n.s.). d = Cohen's d for setting main effect. $*p < .05$ for setting main effect.

Rural v. Urban Family-School Relationships (Exosystems)

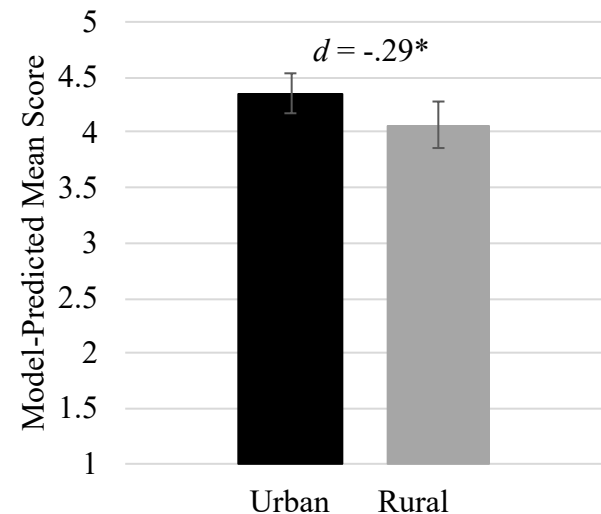
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Changes in Engagement & Relationships over Time

Patterns of change are somewhat consistent with past research

- Home-based involvement *significantly increased* from preschool through kindergarten
- School-based involvement *significantly increased* through preschool
- School-based involvement, structural communication and relational communication *significantly decreased* from end of preschool through the end of kindergarten

Changes in program structure and expectations from Pre-K to Kindergarten may contribute to changes in relationships

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



Urban and Rural Differences in Engagement and Relationships

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 (relatively low) 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.





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Thank You!



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