



Learning Frontiers  
PreK to Grade 3

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# Family Engagement in Rural and Urban Nebraska

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Society for Research on Child Development (SRCD) Biennial Meeting

Baltimore, MD March 21, 2019

## 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)

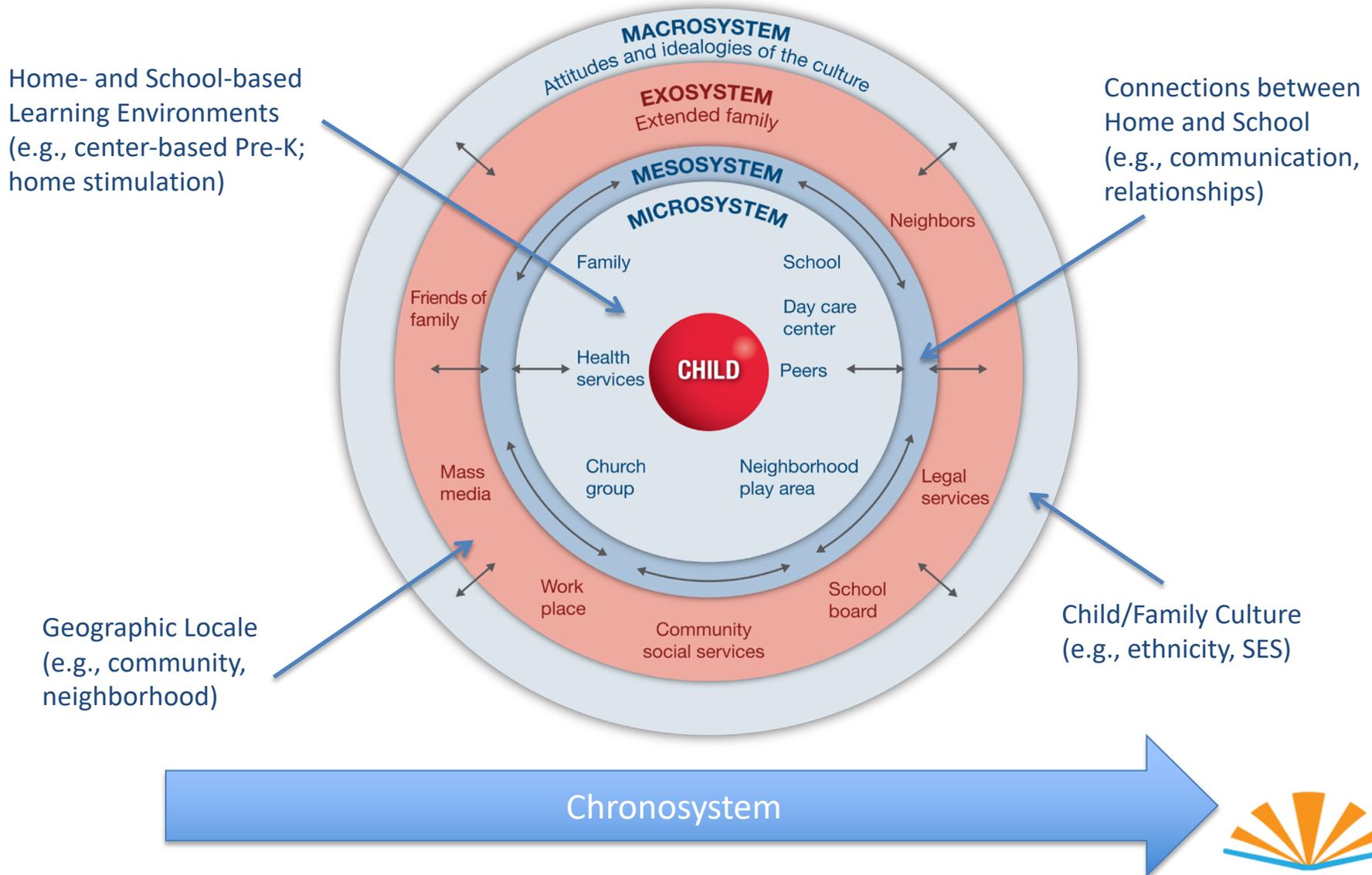
# Transition to Kindergarten

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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)

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

# Measures

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## *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

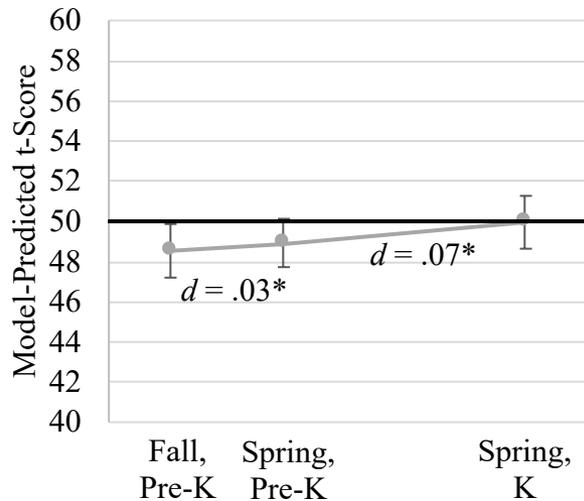
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- Cross-classified multilevel modeling accounted for repeated observations nested within children, and children changing classrooms/schools from Pre-K to Kindergarten
- Models controlled for poverty/low income status, parent education, home language,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

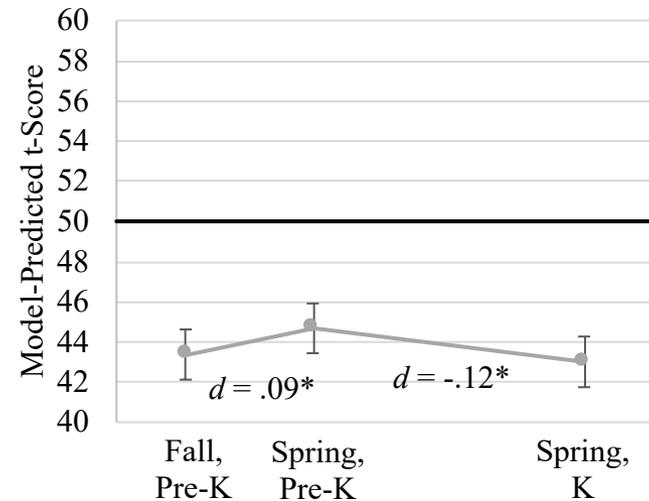


# Trajectories of Family Engagement: Home/School-based Involvement (Microsystems)

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



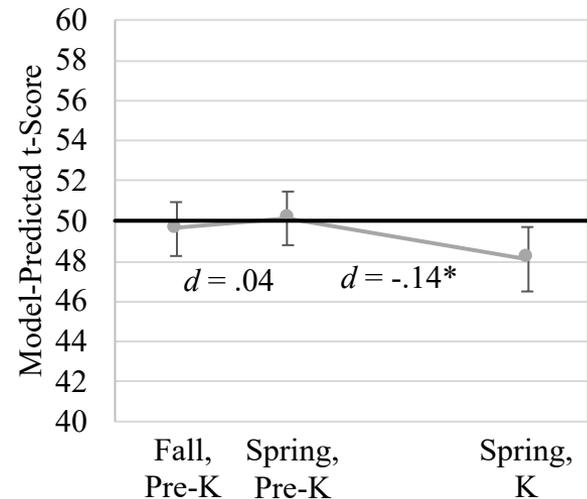
## School-based Involvement (e.g., participation in school-offered events)



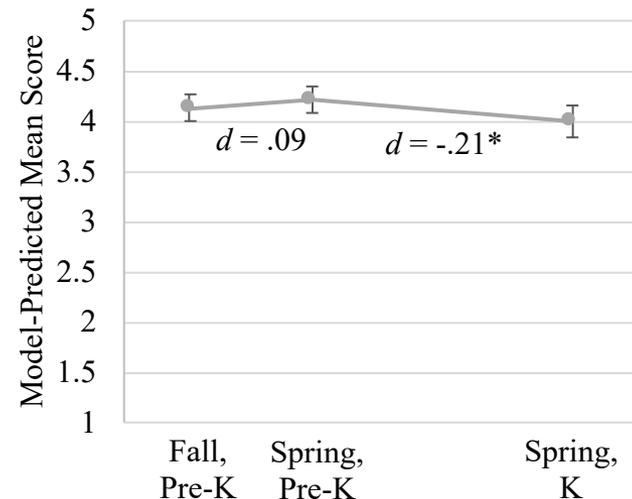
*d* = Cohen's *d* for main effect of time, averaging across geographic setting (time x setting interaction *n.s.*)  
\* *p* < .05 for time main effect.

# Trajectories of Family-School Relationships (Mesosystems)

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



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



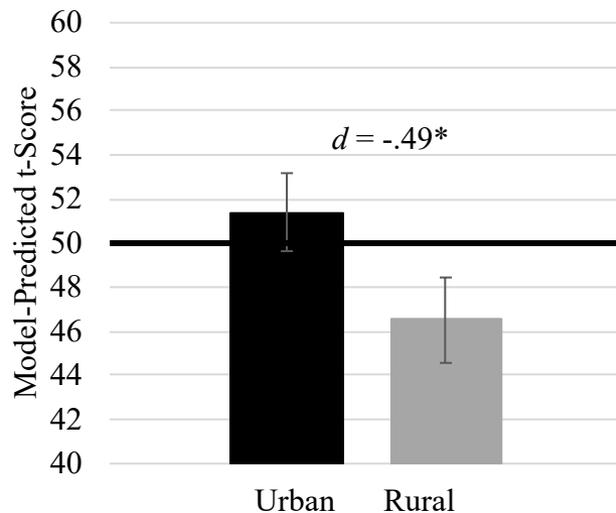
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# Rural v. Urban Family Engagement (Exosystems)

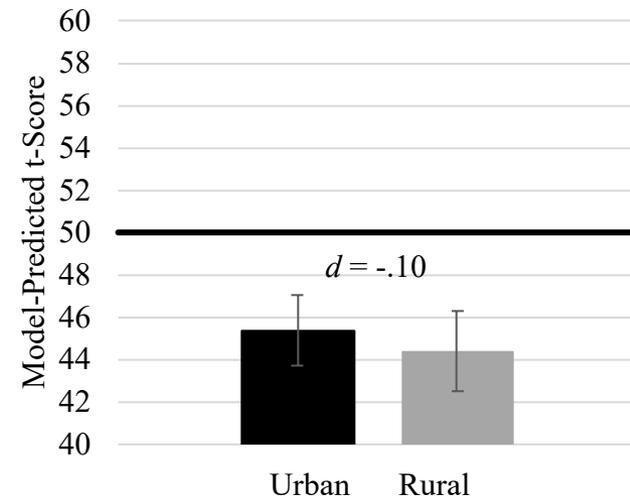
## Home-based Involvement

(e.g., learning activities at home)



## School-based Involvement

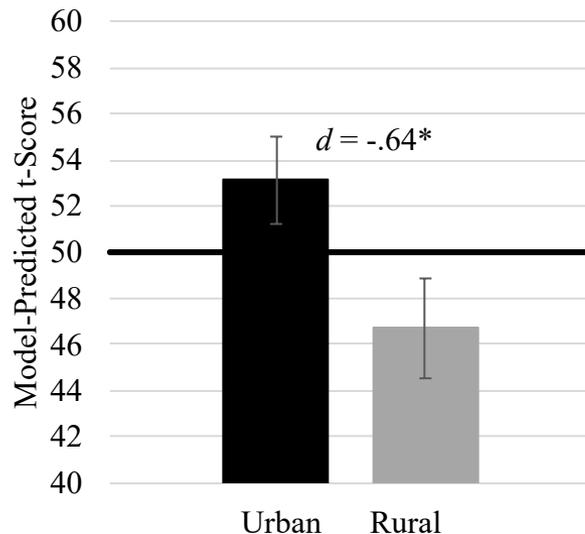
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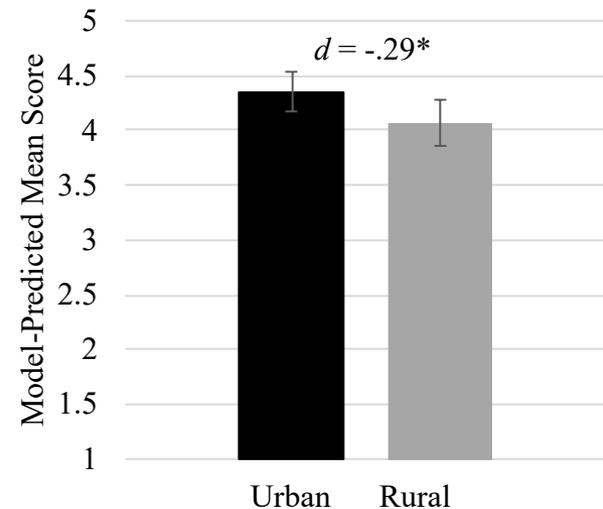
Model predicted family engagement scores and 95% confidence intervals by geographic setting, averaging across time (time X setting interaction n.s.).  $d$  = Cohen's  $d$  for setting main effect. \* $p < .05$  for setting main effect.

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# Changes in Engagement & Relationships over Time

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*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

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*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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*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.*

# Thank You!



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