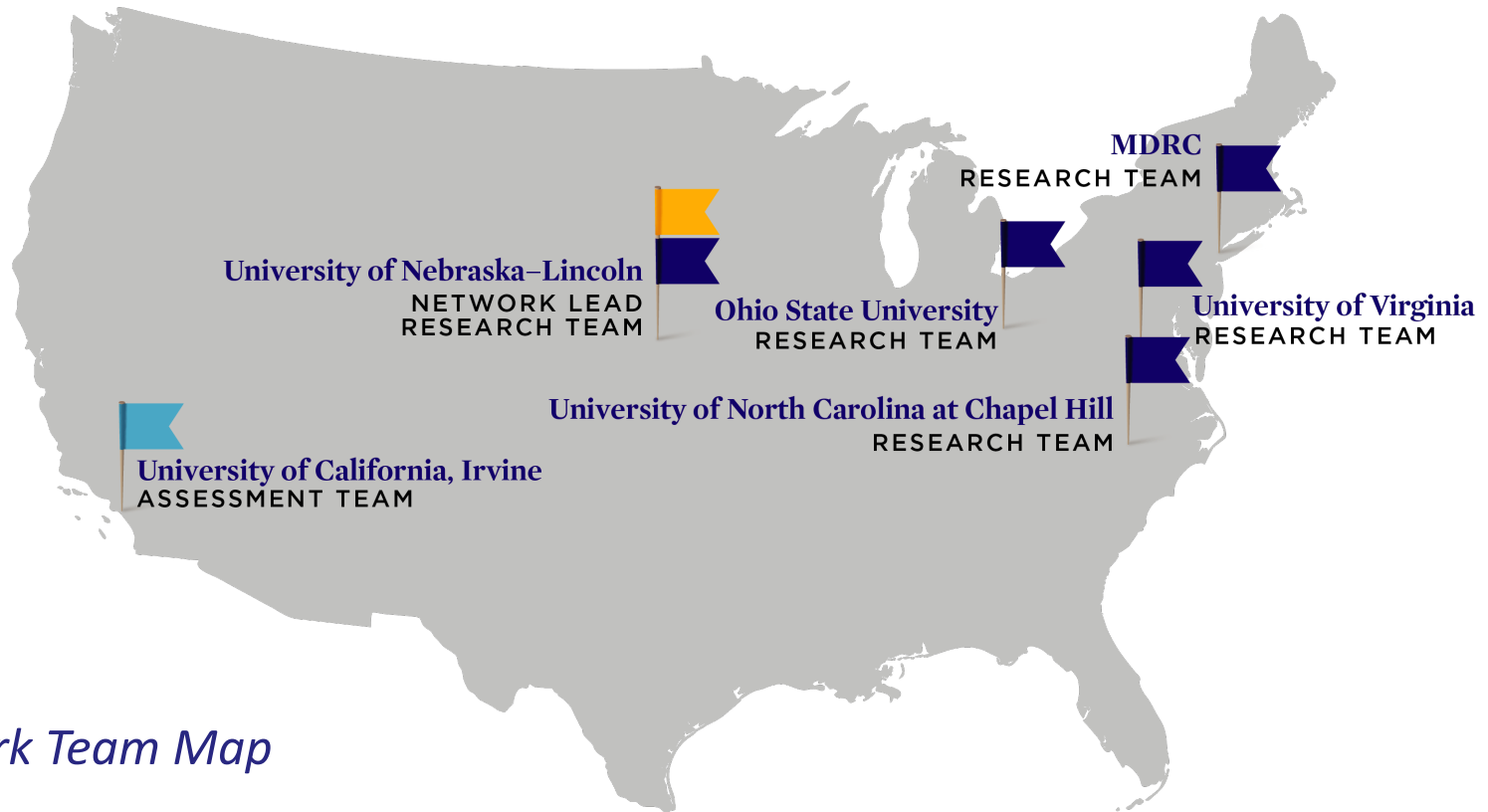SPRING WEBINAR SERIES

earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu

Network Mission

To advance the understanding of policies and practices that narrow the achievement gap and maintain early learning success as children transition from preschool to elementary school and beyond.

Network Team Map

MDRC
RESEARCH TEAM

University of Nebraska–Lincoln
NETWORK LEAD
RESEARCH TEAM

Ohio State University
RESEARCH TEAM

University of Virginia
RESEARCH TEAM

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
RESEARCH TEAM

University of California, Irvine
ASSESSMENT TEAM

Network Team Map

♦ Five Research Teams

♦ One Assessment Team

♦ Network Lead

Bridging the Gap:
Easing Transitions between Pre-K and Kindergarten

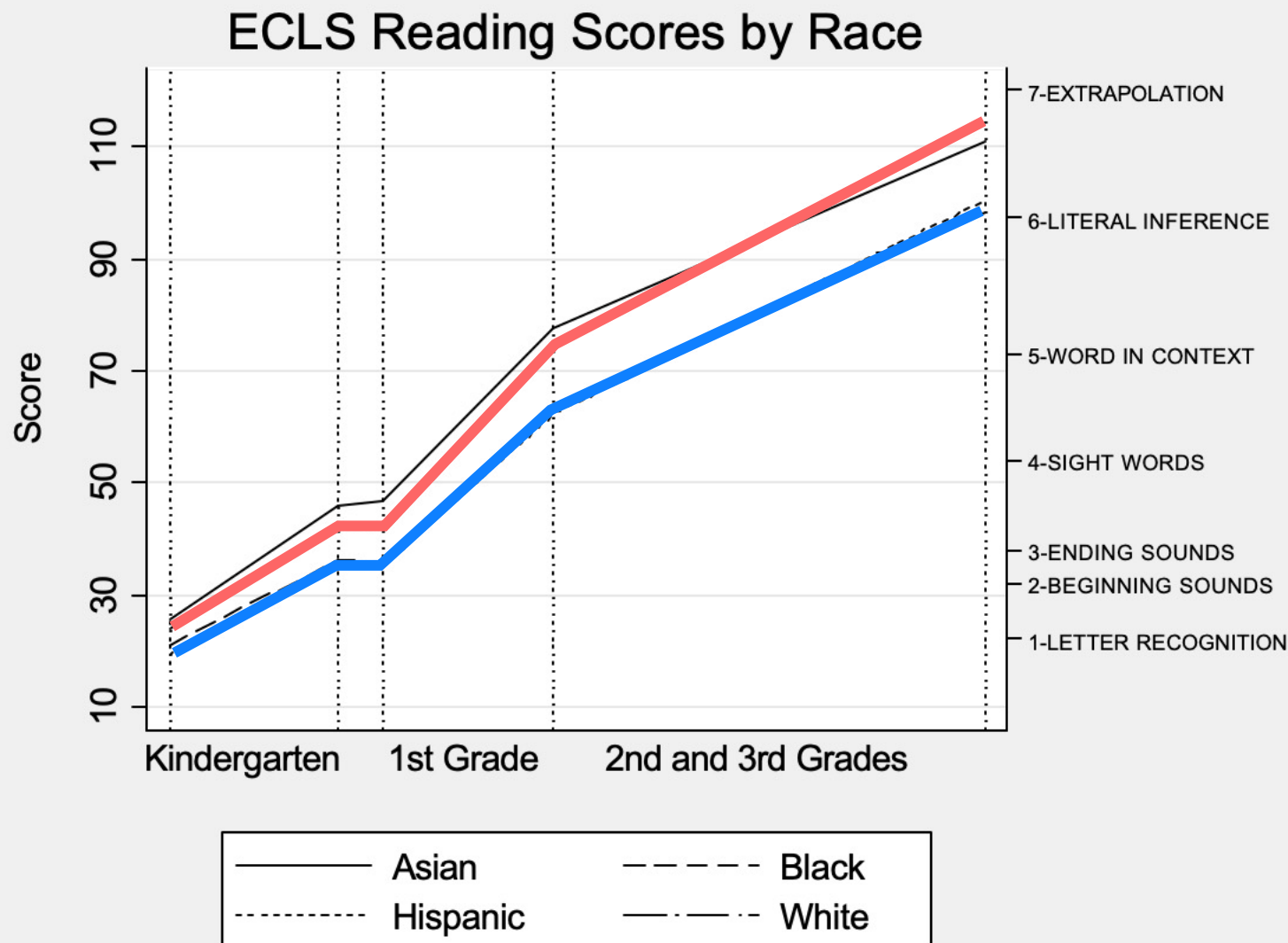Ginny Vitiello

University of Virginia

Overview

- Background: Importance of alignment

- (Mis)alignment of race and language

- (Mis)alignment of teacher-child interactions

- Considerations for practice & policy

Why should we be concerned about alignment?

FIGURE 3.3: DIFFERENCES IN READING LEARNING RATES BY RACE/ETHNICITY—ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
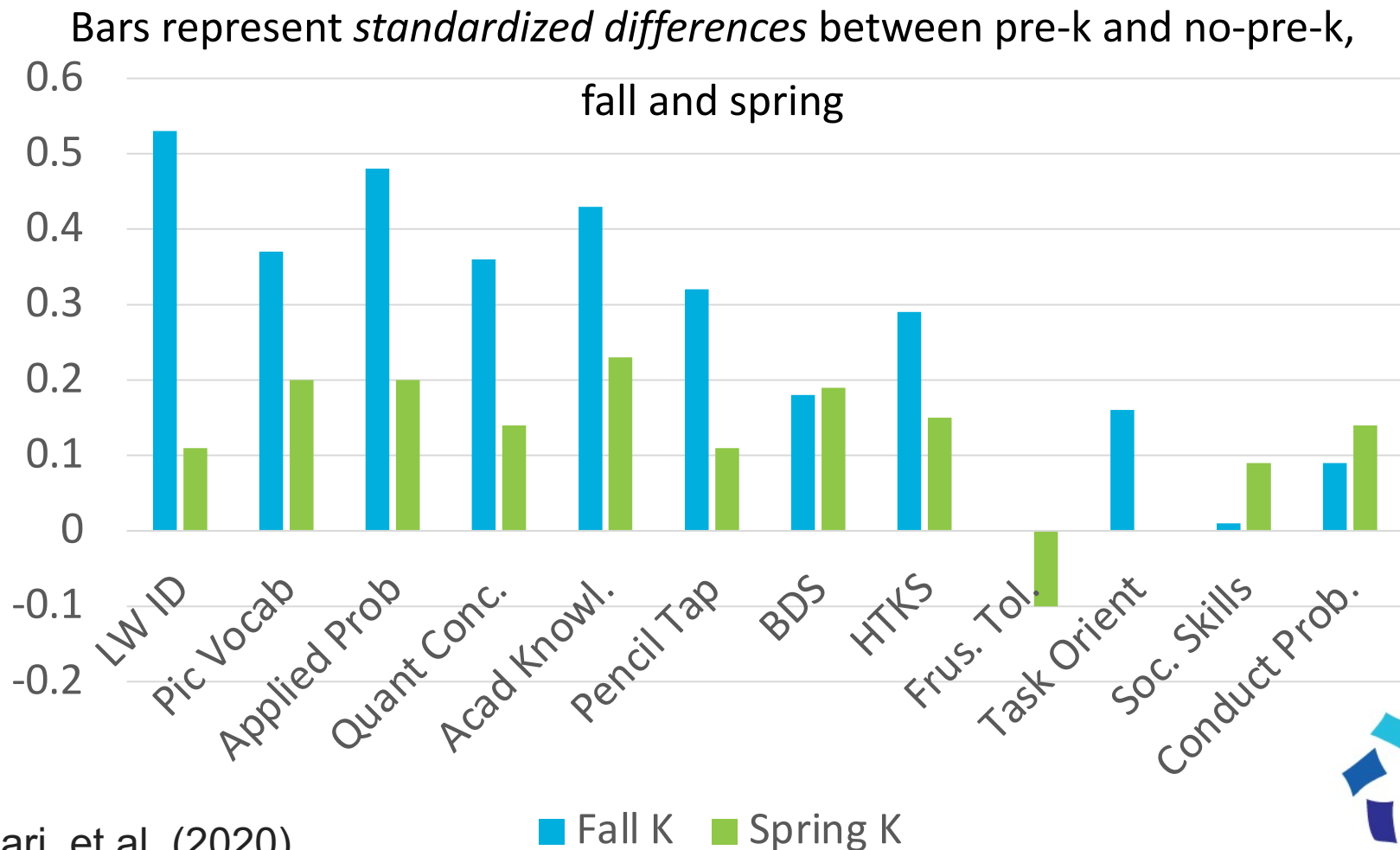
LoGerfo, Nichols, & Reardon. (2016). Achievement Gains in Elementary and High School. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Pre-K to Close Opportunity Gaps

Pre-K Convergence

Bars represent *standardized differences* between pre-k and no-pre-k, fall and spring
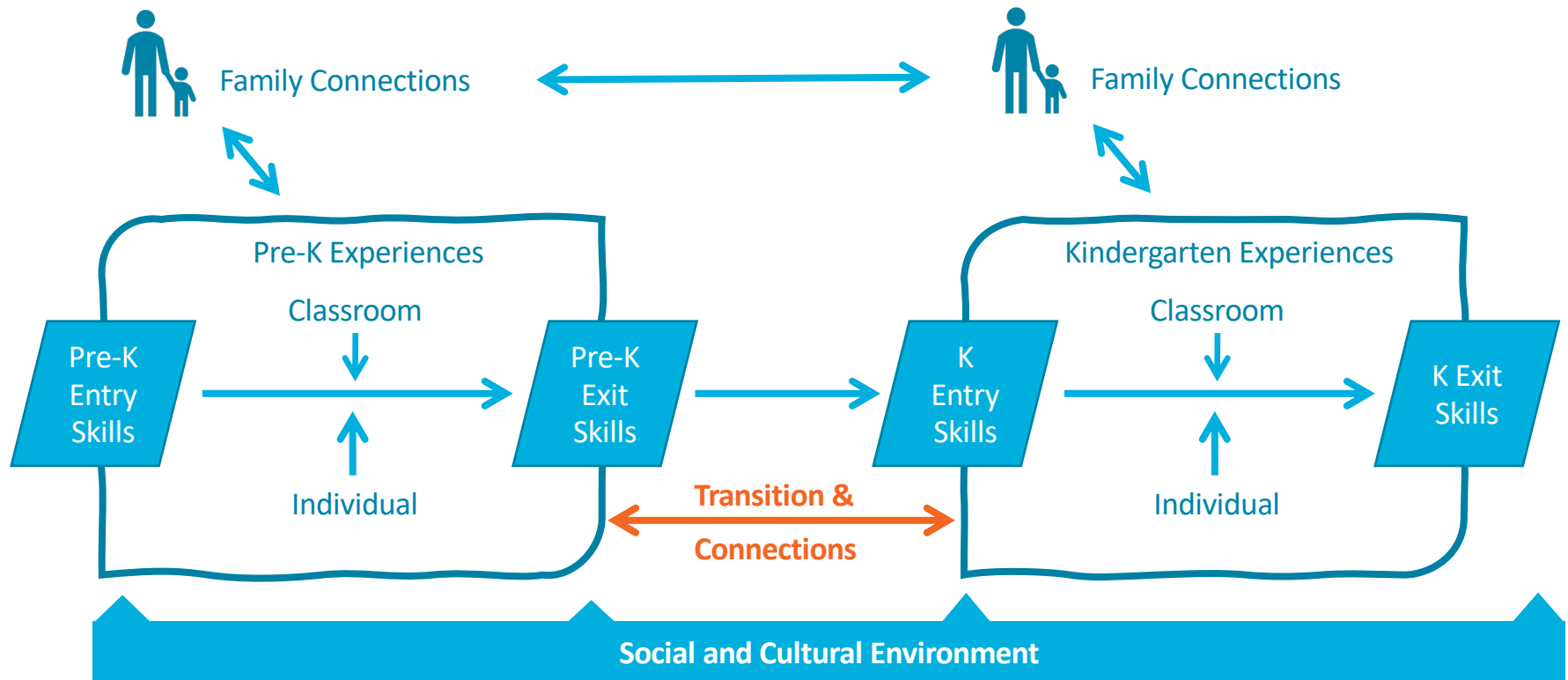
Ansari, et al. (2020).

Aligned Experiences

- Predictable

- Coherent

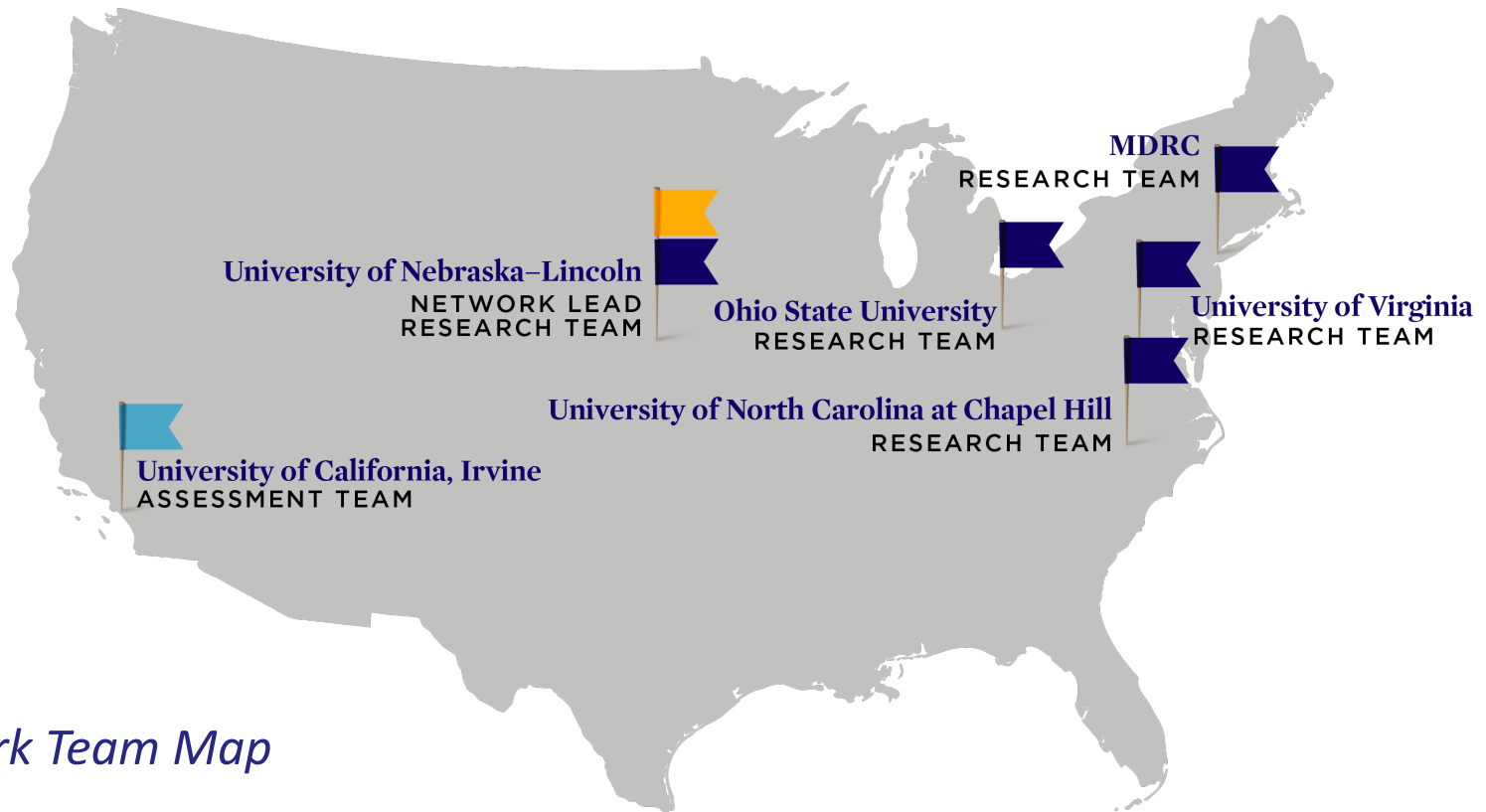# What Predicts Kindergarten Success after Pre-K?

Motivation

- Understand how children's pre-K and kindergarten experiences are similar or different from each other

- Discuss approaches for bringing pre-K and kindergarten into greater alignment

Methods

MDRC
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Alignment/Misalignment of Race and Language

Race & Language

- Do pre-K and kindergarten provide children with race- and language-diverse teachers?

- Having a same-race or same-ethnicity teacher can be beneficial for children of color (Downer et al., 2016)

- Evidence that having some instruction in students' home language benefits English language learners (Genessee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012)
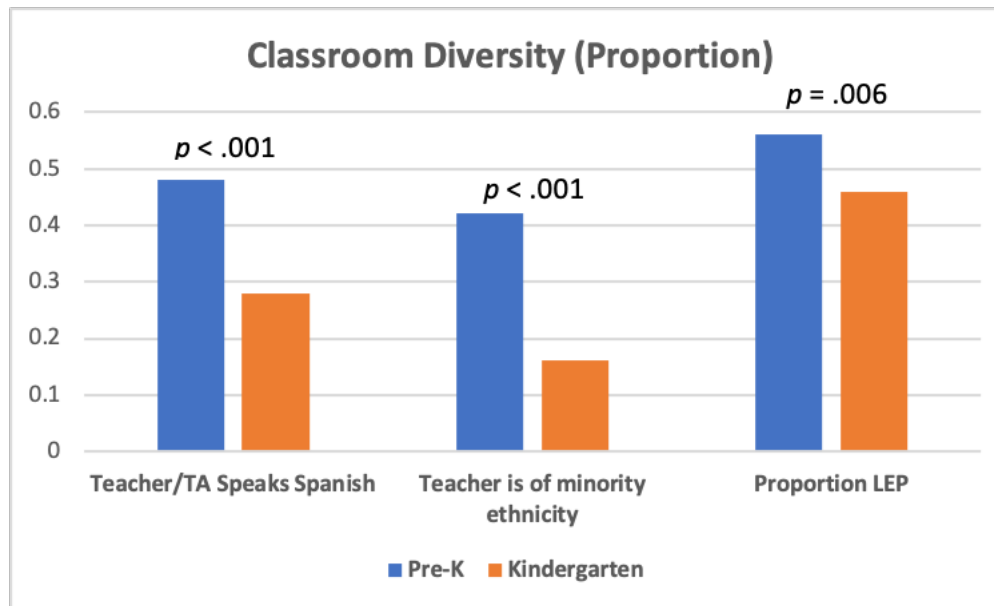
Findings

PRE-K TEACHERS
42% were from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS
16% were from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds

Classroom Diversity (Proportion)

$p < .001$ (Teacher/TA Speaks Spanish)
$p < .001$ (Teacher is of minority ethnicity)
$p = .006$ (Proportion LEP)

Pre-K   Kindergarten

Recommendations

- Hire diverse teaching staff

- Encourage school personnel to explore and understand their backgrounds, expectations, and biases

- Represent diverse children and adults through books, images, and activities

- Learn best practices for culturally grounded teaching

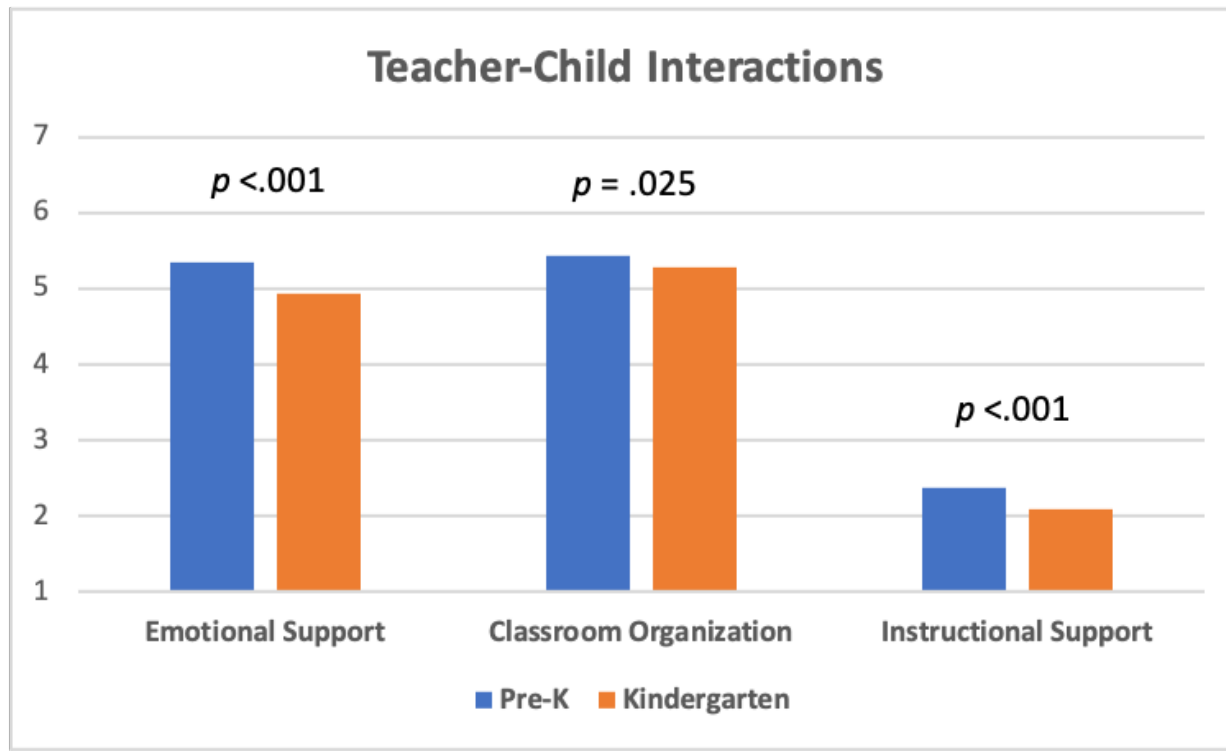# Alignment/Misalignment of Teacher-Child Interactions

Teacher-Child Interactions

- Is the quality of teacher-child interactions comparable in pre-k and kindergarten?

- Interactions that are warm, supportive, and stimulating (Pianta et al., 2008)

- Small but consistent associations with academic and social-emotional development

Findings

- Interactions tended to be higher quality in pre-K

Teacher-Child Interactions

$p < .001$ $p = .025$ $p < .001$

Emotional Support   Classroom Organization   Instructional Support

■ Pre-K ■ Kindergarten

Recommendations

- Provide professional development and coaching focused on improving teacher-child interactions

- Make time for kindergarten teachers to interact with children, individually or in small groups

- Choose curricula, social-emotional learning practices that provide autonomy, foster social competence

Bridging the Gap:
Easing Transitions between Pre-K and Kindergarten

Kelly Purtell

The Ohio State University

Webinar #1: Kindergarten
Transitions

Overview

- (Mis)alignment of learning opportunities

- Connections between adults

- Considerations for practice & policy

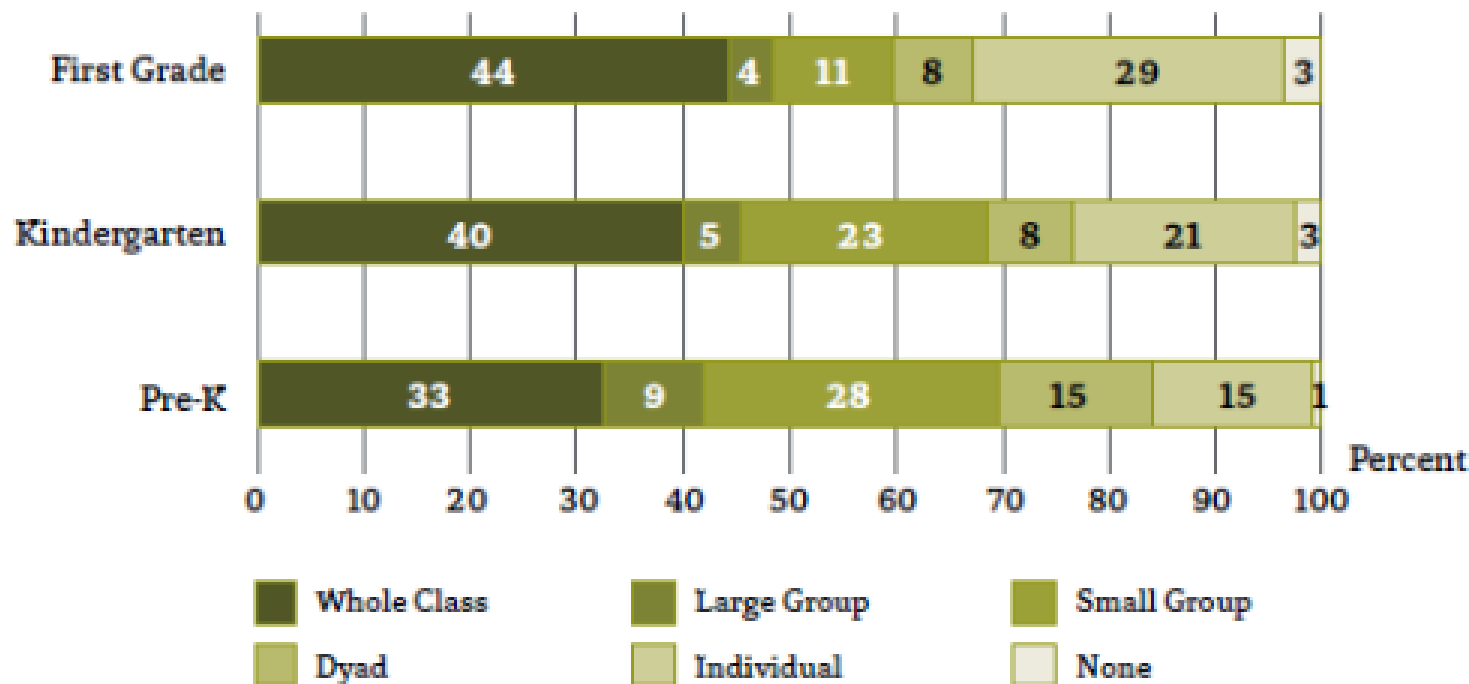# Alignment/Misalignment of Learning Opportunities

Learning Opportunities

- Look very different in Pre-K and K
    - Consistent finding across sites (e.g., Vitiello et al., 2020)
    - Time spent on academics
    - Differences in setting

- Pose challenges for children across transition
    - Different expectations
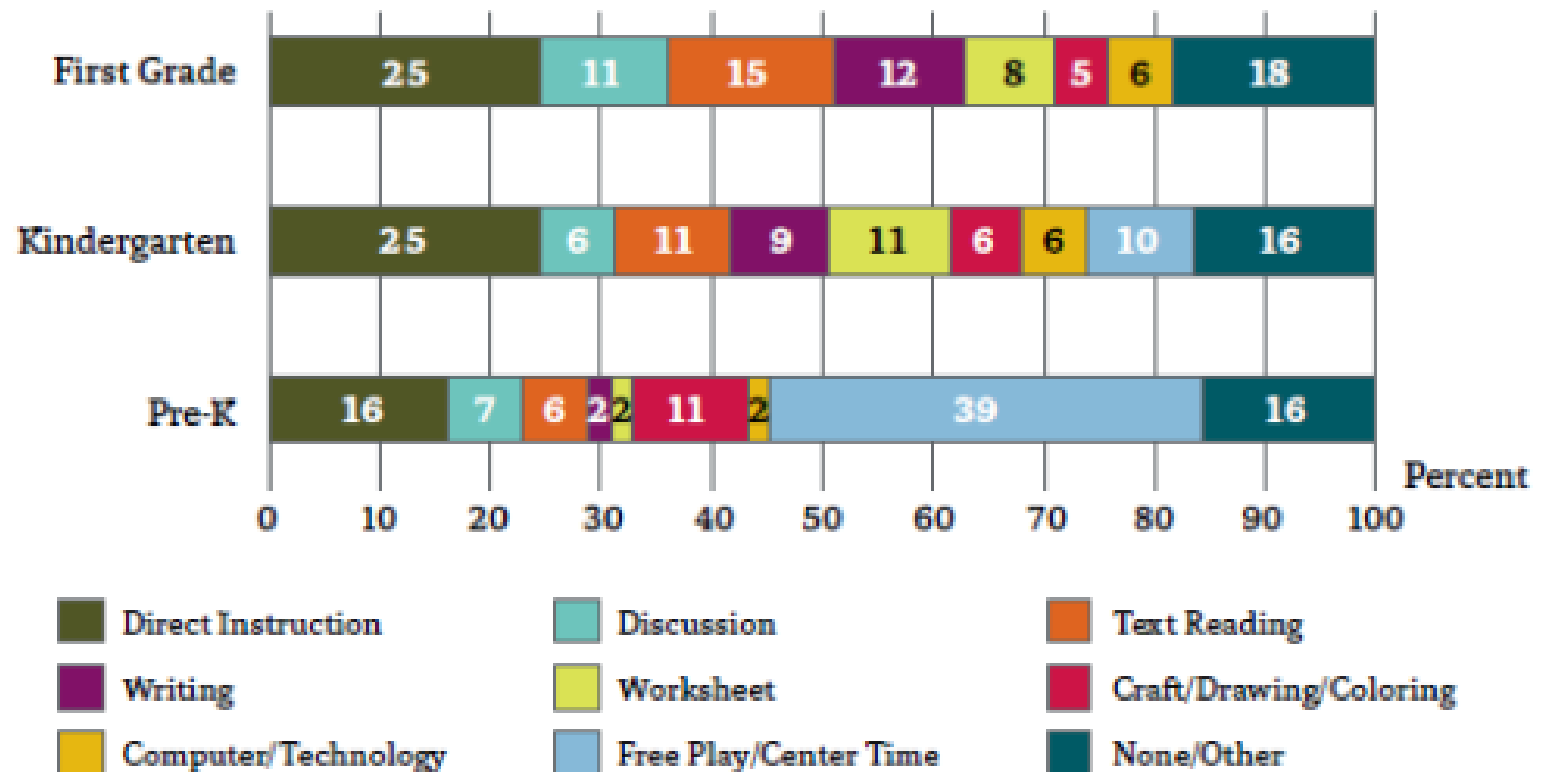   - Different demands

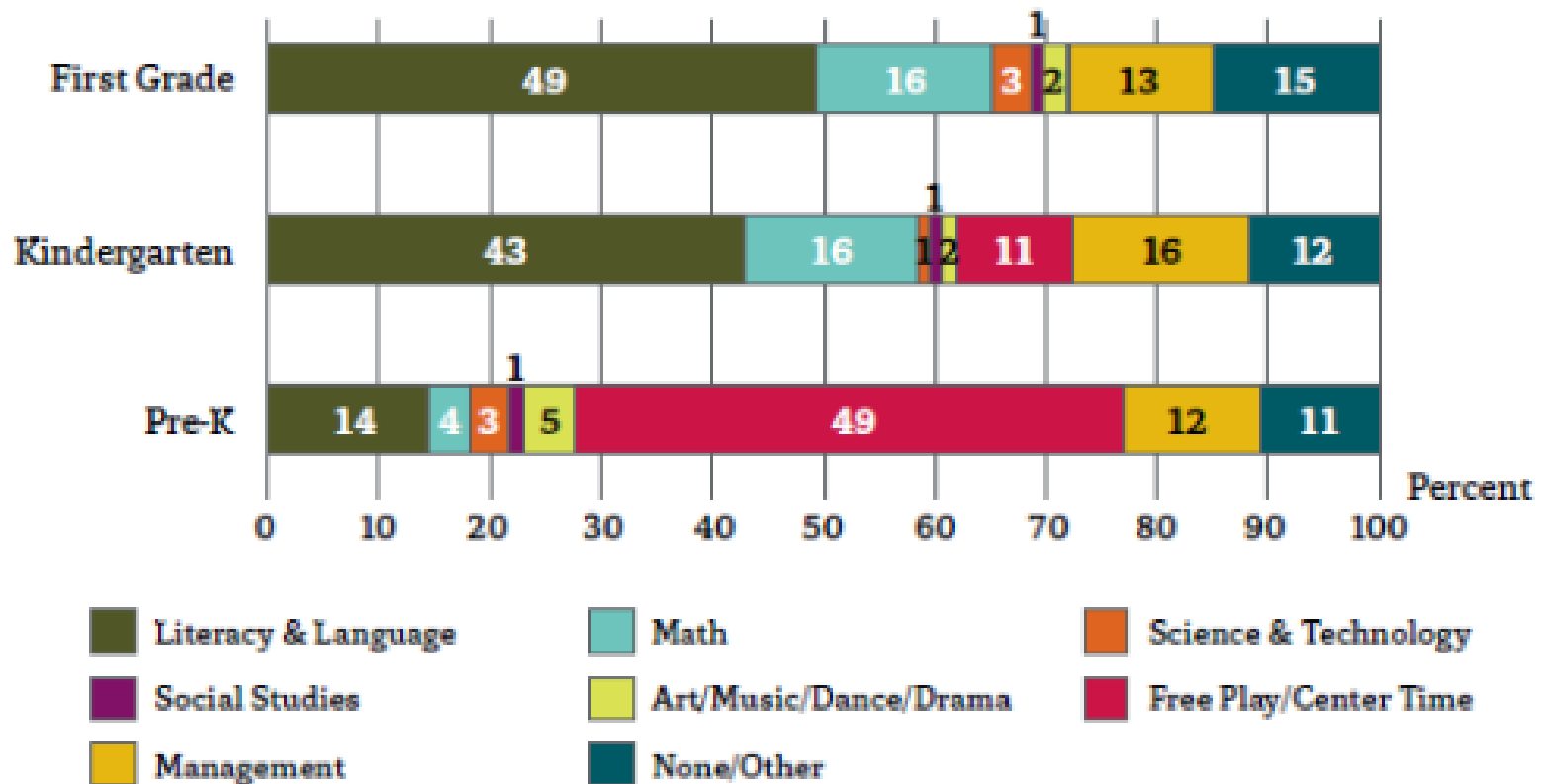# Learning Opportunities

Justice et al., 2020

Learning Opportunities

Justice et al., 2020

Learning Opportunities

Justice et al., 2020

Learning Opportunities

- Redundancy in content
  - 37% of content overlap in Pre-k and K in NC (Little et al., 2021)

- The Boston model (McCormick et al., 2020)
  - Focus on vertical alignment from PK-Grade 2
  - Continued use of small groups and centers in elementary school
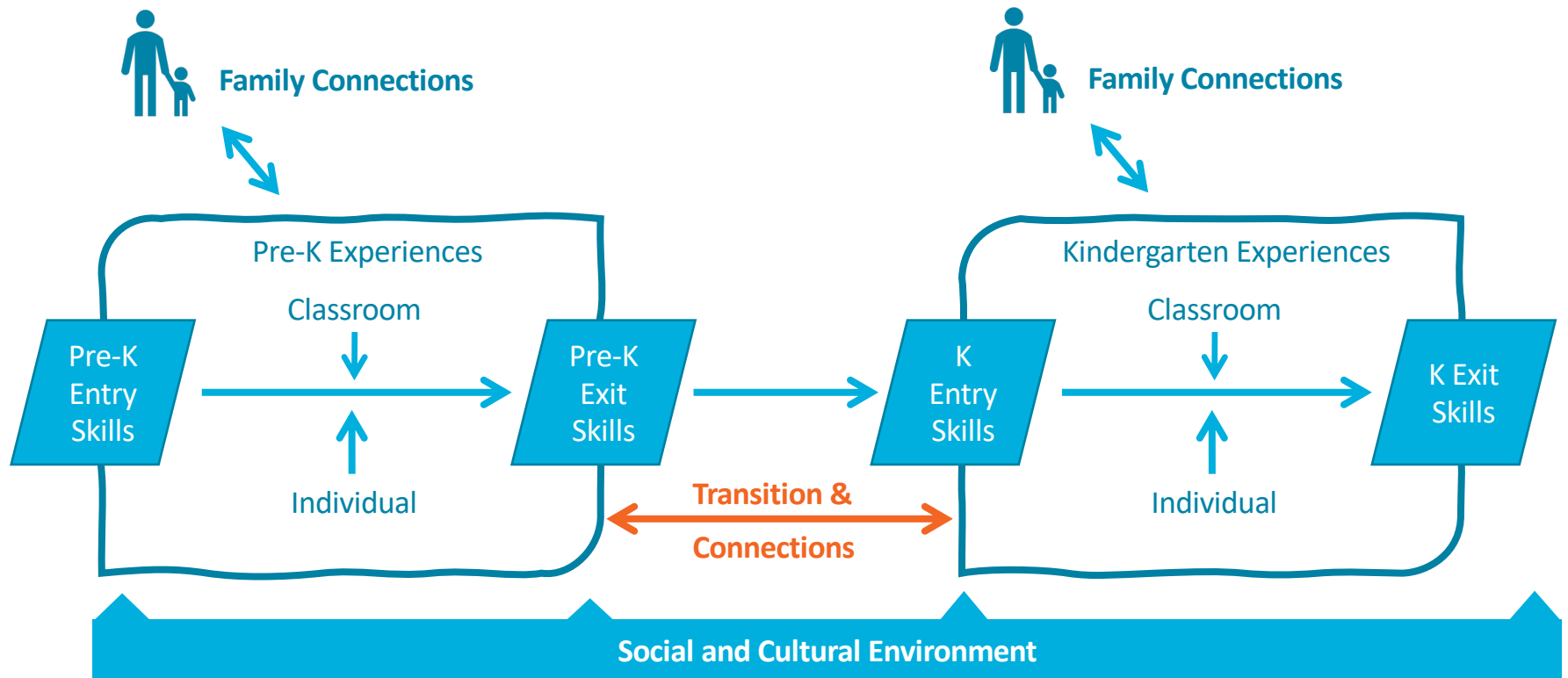
Recommendations

- Content that builds upon earlier learning

- Grouping practices that mirror children's preschool experiences

- Bringing together teachers and administrators from across preschool sectors and elementary schools to build alignment

Connections Between Adults

Connections Across Systems

Connections with Families

- Connections between families and schools promotes children's academic and behavioral success over time.

- Importance during the transition to kindergarten
  - Pattern-setting period

Connections with Families

- Decrease from pre-k to k (Sheridan et al.)
  - School-based involvement
  - Structural and relational communication

- Why?
  - Changing expectations
  - Teacher: child ratios
  - Drop-off and pick-up changes

Connections across Pre-K and K

- Challenges to good communication (Purtell et al., 2020)
  - Different systems
  - Logistical challenges
  - Different goals

- Why important?
  - Reduce misalignment
  - Provide information about children's needs
  - Make the transition more predictable for children and families

Recommendations

- Focus on building sustained connections with families

- Professional development involving preschool and elementary school personnel

- Build systems that foster communication
  - Data systems

Q&A

- **What questions do you have?**
  - *Put them in the Zoom Q&A box*
  - *Post them in the comments section of our Facebook Live video* @earlylearningnetwork

Upcoming Webinars

May 4: Family engagement
May 18: Diversity, equity and inclusion
June 1: Individualized instruction and assessment

11:00 a.m. CDT | 12:00 p.m. EDT | 9:00 a.m. PDT

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Thank You

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