

Child Care Factors that Influence Parental Engagement: Understanding Longitudinal Pathways to Children's School Readiness

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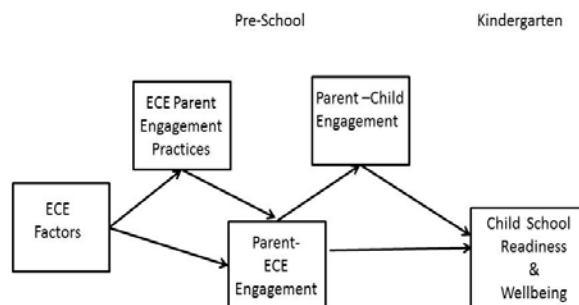
Project Description

Early Care and Education (ECE) settings play an important role in child development for many children of preschool age. The powerful positive impacts of ECE programs on young children's development may be strengthened when programs work with parents. Parent engagement in early learning activities has been positively linked to children's school readiness and social-emotional well-being (Hindman & Morrison, 2011; Powell et al., 2010). The specific mechanisms by which ECE programs influence parent engagement, however, and how this engagement improves children's development, remain unclear.

The goal of this project is to examine how ECE program factors are linked to parent engagement in child care, and in turn how this engagement leads to school readiness and child well-being among children enrolled in center-based care in preschool.

Research Questions

1. What ECE center factors (structural characteristics, program type, caregiver experience and education, learning environment (curriculum and learning activities), caregiver-child relationship, and caregiver attitudes about the transition to kindergarten) are associated with ECE Parent Engagement Practices in preschool?
2. Do ECE center factors and ECE Parent Engagement Practices predict concurrent levels of Parent-ECE Engagement? Do these associations vary for low-income families?
3. Is Parent-ECE Engagement in preschool positively associated with children's school readiness skills and social-emotional well-being in kindergarten directly and indirectly via increases in Parent-Child Engagement? Do these associations vary for low-income families?



Sample

- The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) is one of a series of nationally representative longitudinal studies designed to examine child development, school readiness, and early school experiences (see <https://nces.ed.gov/ecls/index.asp>).
- The ECLS-B is a sample of children born in 2001. Data were collected at 9 months, 2 years, preschool, and kindergarten (2006/7 and 2007/8); the sample includes approximately 7,700 children (Najarian, Snow, Kinsey, & Mulligan, 2010).
- Within this sample, we will identify children who participated in center-based non-parental early care and education during the preschool data collection period, approximately 4,900 children (Flanagan & McPhee, 2009).

Methods

Measures

- School Readiness (All direct child assessment):
 - *Language: Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, PreLAS.*
 - *Literacy: Preschool Comprehensive Test of Phonological and Print Processing (Pre-CTOPPP); PreLAS; ECLS-B items.*
 - *Math: Woodcock Johnson items; ECLS-B items*

- Child Well-Being (Parent and Teacher report):
 - *Prosocial Behaviors*: items developed by ECLS-B.
 - *Attention Problems*: items developed by ECLS-B.
- Parent-Child Engagement (Observation, Parent report): Cognitive Stimulation from *Two Bag Test*; frequency: reading, singing, story-telling, playing ; library use.
- Parent-ECE Engagement (Parent report): attended general school/Head Start/center meeting; went to a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference; attended a school/Head Start/center, or class event; acted as a volunteer at the school/Head Start/center; served on a committee; attended or chaperoned a field trip.
- ECE Engagement Practices (Parent report, Caregiver report). Items: How well child's school/Head Start/center: Lets you know how child is doing in school/the program; helps you understand what children at child's age are like; makes you aware of chances to volunteer at the school/Head Start/center; provides workshops, materials, or advice about how to help child learn at home; provides information on community services to help child or your family; caregiver gets time to tell parents about child's day.
- ECE Factors (Caregiver and parent report)
 - *Structural*: Center-based care: non-profit status, sponsorship, accreditation, average fee; accepts subsidies, center services (e.g. developmental and health screenings, sick care); type of care center based care/Pre-K/ Head Start (y/n); licensing.
 - *Curriculum Activities*: Use of formal curriculum; math activities; reading and language activities; participation in group and individual activities
 - *Provider factors*: Demographics; experience, training, and education; professional certificates and credentials
 - *Caregiver beliefs/ attitudes*: Activities to smooth transition to K; importance of school readiness skills for kindergarten
 - *Provider-Child relationship*: Conflict between caregiver and child (e.g., angry after disciplined; closeness with child (e.g., seek comfort)
- Control Variables: (parent, birth certificate, caregiver):
 - *Parent*: Depressive symptoms, education, marital status, employment, poverty, family size.
 - *Child*: language in home, race/ethnicity, gender, low birth weight, premature birth, health risks; time in child care, amount of time in child care per week, number of child care arrangements.
- Analyses

Using a series of regression models (e.g. Ordinary Least Squares hierarchical multiple regression), we will:

 - a. examine the relationships between parent and child variables, ECE center factors and ECE Parent Engagement Practices
 - b. examine whether ECE center factors and ECE Engagement Practices predict concurrent levels of Parent-ECE Engagement (creating separate models by poverty status)
 - c. examine whether Parent-ECE Engagement in preschool is positively associated with children's school readiness skills and social-emotional well-being in kindergarten directly and indirectly via increases in Parent-Child Engagement

Implications for policy/practice

This project has the potential to identify critical levers for future policy and program development aimed at improving ECE efforts to promote parent engagement, and maximizing the effectiveness of family engagement in childcare for children's early school success and well-being.

This project will inform the efforts of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which aims to promote school readiness and engage families (OCC, 2014).

For more information

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