



# Understanding The Transition to Kindergarten

## Kelly M. Purtell



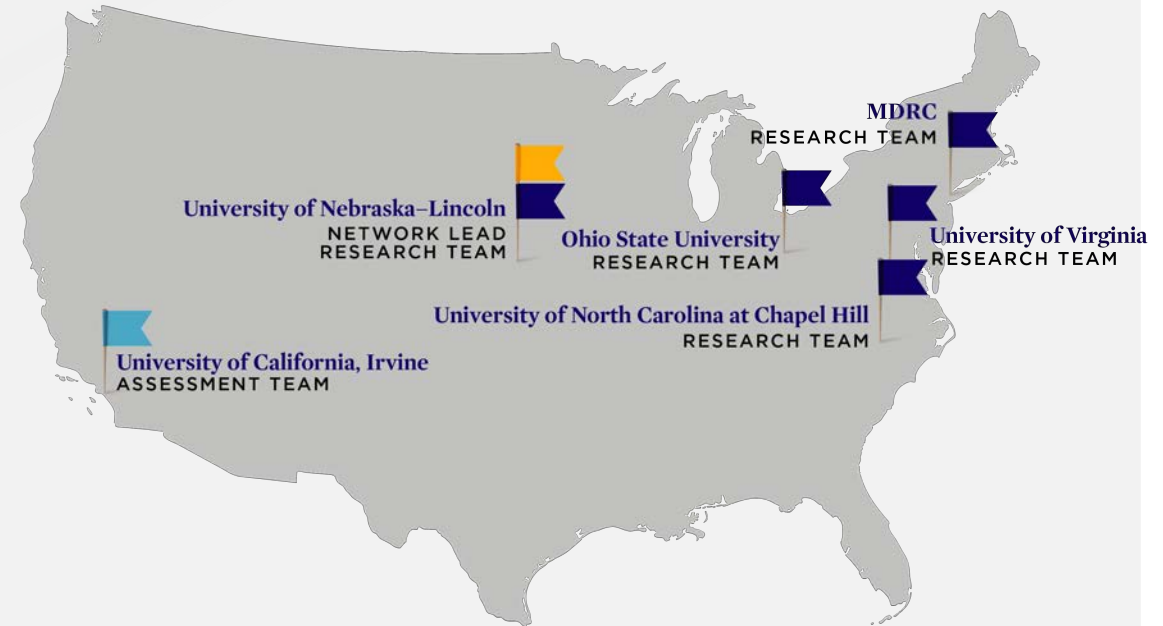
# Overview

- Why is the kindergarten transition important?
- How are kids doing during the kindergarten transition?
- How do experiences before kindergarten shape children's experiences in the transition?
- What practices promote positive transitions?



# Data Sources

- **Early Learning Network**
  - Funded by the Institute for Educational Sciences
- **Focus on Pre-K through Grade 3**
  - Malleable Factors



# Data Sources

- **Early Learning Ohio**
  - Interviews with teachers and administrators in over 25 districts across Ohio
  - An in-depth look at 180 PK-G3 classrooms in central Ohio
  - A longitudinal study of over 700 children from K-G3



# Additional Data Sources

- Other Early Learning Network Sites
- National data from elementary schools and Head Start programs
- Emerging data on a new approach to family engagement during the kindergarten transition in Ohio



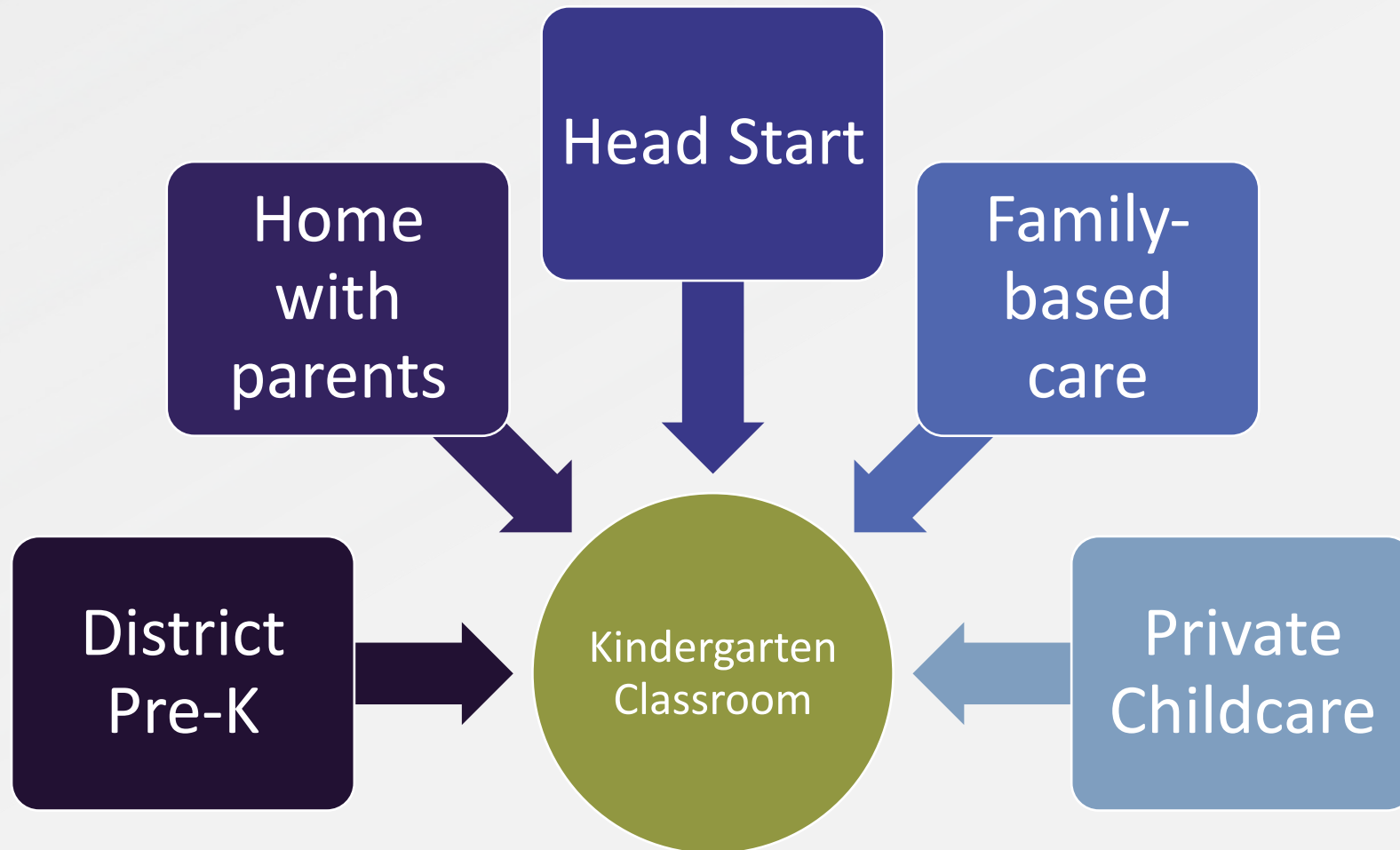
# Why is the transition important?



- The transition to kindergarten is a key time for children's development of skills that foster school success.
  - Emergent Literacy
  - Self-Regulation
  - Social Development



# Why is the transition important?



Or some combination of these experiences...

For some length of time...



# **The Transition to Kindergarten for Children**

- **Are kids experiencing challenges at the start of kindergarten?**
  - **Teacher reports of challenges**
  - **688 children (45 classrooms)**
    - **51% boys**
    - **70% White; 8% African American; 11% Other Race; 11% Multi-Racial**
    - **48% had family incomes under \$40,000**
    - **24% had bachelor's degree or higher**
    - **89% English as primary home language**

Purtell et al., 2021 CCEC White Paper

Jiang et al., 2021 *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

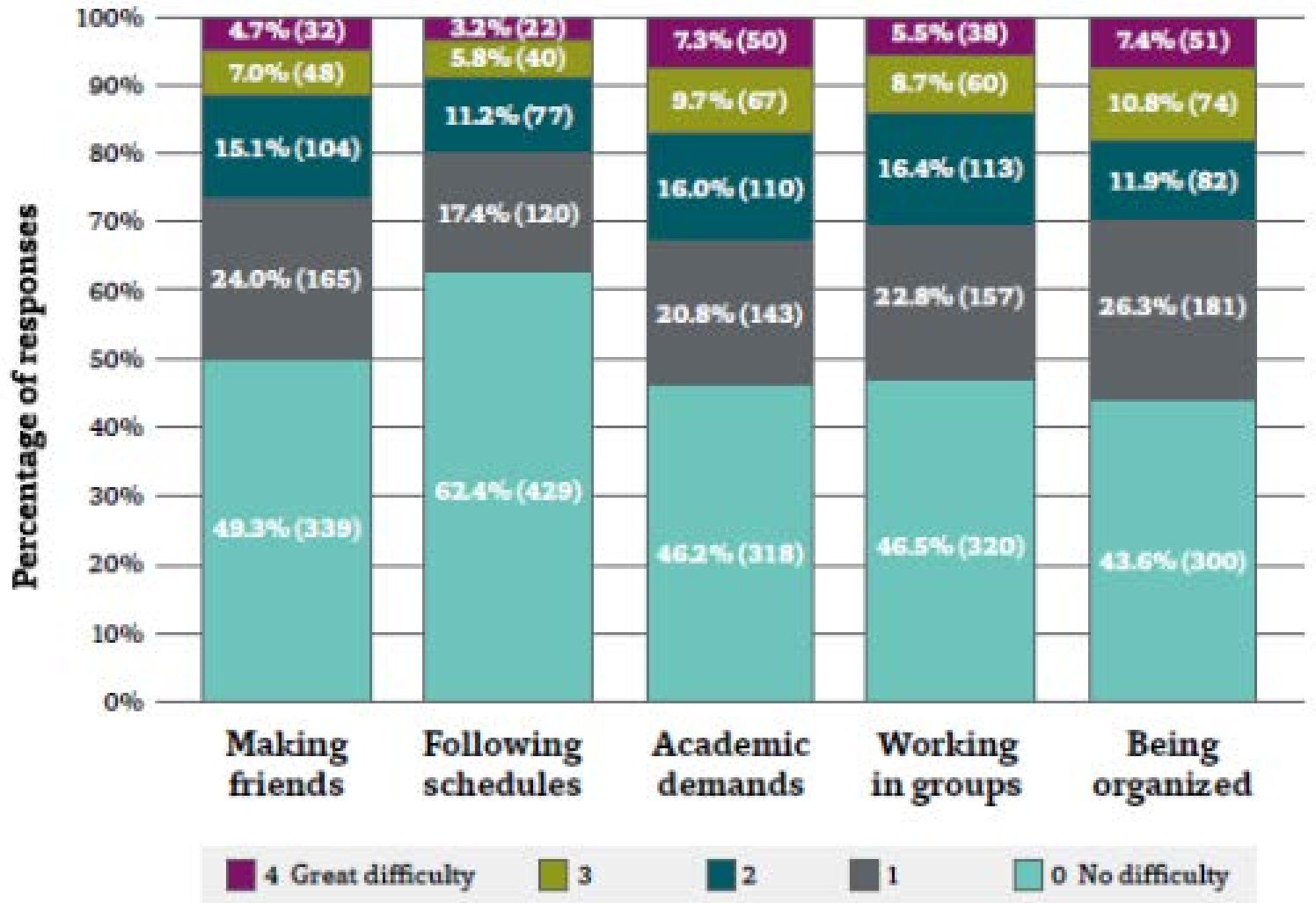


# The Transition to Kindergarten for Children

Teachers reported on children's difficulties as they transitioned into kindergarten.

Difficulties were likely to co-occur with over 30% of children have at least some difficulty in all five categories.

Boys were much more likely to be reported as having difficulties than girls.



Purtell et al., 2021 CCEC White Paper  
 Jiang et al., 2021 *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

# **Prior Experiences and the Transition to Kindergarten**

- **Consistent preschool advantage in academic skills (early language, literacy, and math at the start of kindergarten)**
  - In our own data, other Early Learning data, and many studies across the country (and world!)
- **However, we saw no differences in the number of challenges.**
- **Even children who attend preschool experience big shifts as they enter kindergarten.**



# **Key Aspects of the Transition**

- **Children's experiences in the classroom**
  - Kindergarten is a fundamentally new experience for children.
- **Support for children and their families across transition**
  - Preschools, elementary schools, and communities need to help children and their families across this adjustment period.



# Promoting Positive Transitions: Systems

- For many children, they are moving from a pre-school/pre-k system to an elementary school system.
  - Even if in district preschool
- Different operating agencies and regulatory systems
- Differing orientations on classroom processes
  - Curriculum and Professional Development Opportunities



# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Current Transition Supports Across Systems**

## **Child- and Family-Focused Practices**

- **Staggered Starts to Kindergarten**
- **Visits to Kindergarten Classrooms**
- **Information Meetings to Prepare**
- **Resource Nights**
  
- **Lack of in-depth cross-system efforts**

Purtell et al., 2020 *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

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# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Potential Cross-System Supports**

- **Lack of data sharing or use of data**
  - **Both directions**
  - **Preschool attendance and performance -> kindergarten teachers**
  - **Kindergarten readiness data-> preschool teachers**
- **Little engagement across systems**
  - **Most with district-offered pre-k, but still limits**

Purtell et al., 2020 *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

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# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Barriers to Improving Systems**

- **Fragmentation of ECE**
- **Regulations & Pressures**
  - QRIS in preschools
  - Standards and preparation for testing in elementary schools
- **Time & Place**
  - When to communicate
  - When to get in the same room

Purtell et al., 2020 *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

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# **Promoting Positive Transitions: What Improves Cross-System Connections**

## **Explicit Policies & Procedures**

- **Head Start**
- **IDEA Act**
- **Every Student Succeeds Acts (ESSA)**

Purtell et al., 2020 *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

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# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Alignment of Experiences**

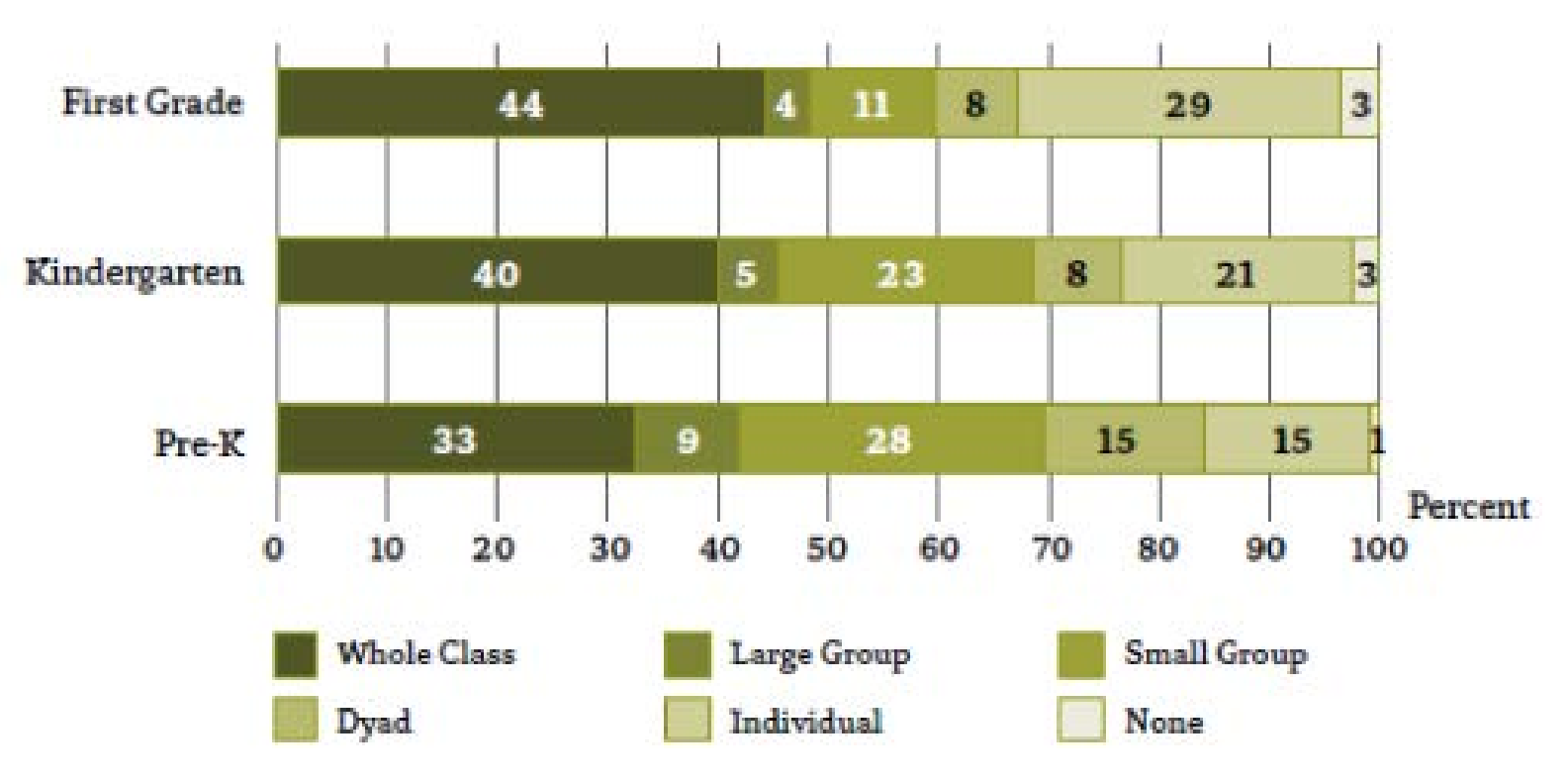
- How do children experience classrooms differently from preschool to kindergarten?
- Data from observations in 120 pre-k, kindergarten, and 1<sup>st</sup> grade classrooms in central Ohio
  - Grouping Practices
  - Type of Instruction
  - Time in Academic Content

Justice et al., 2020 CCEC White Paper

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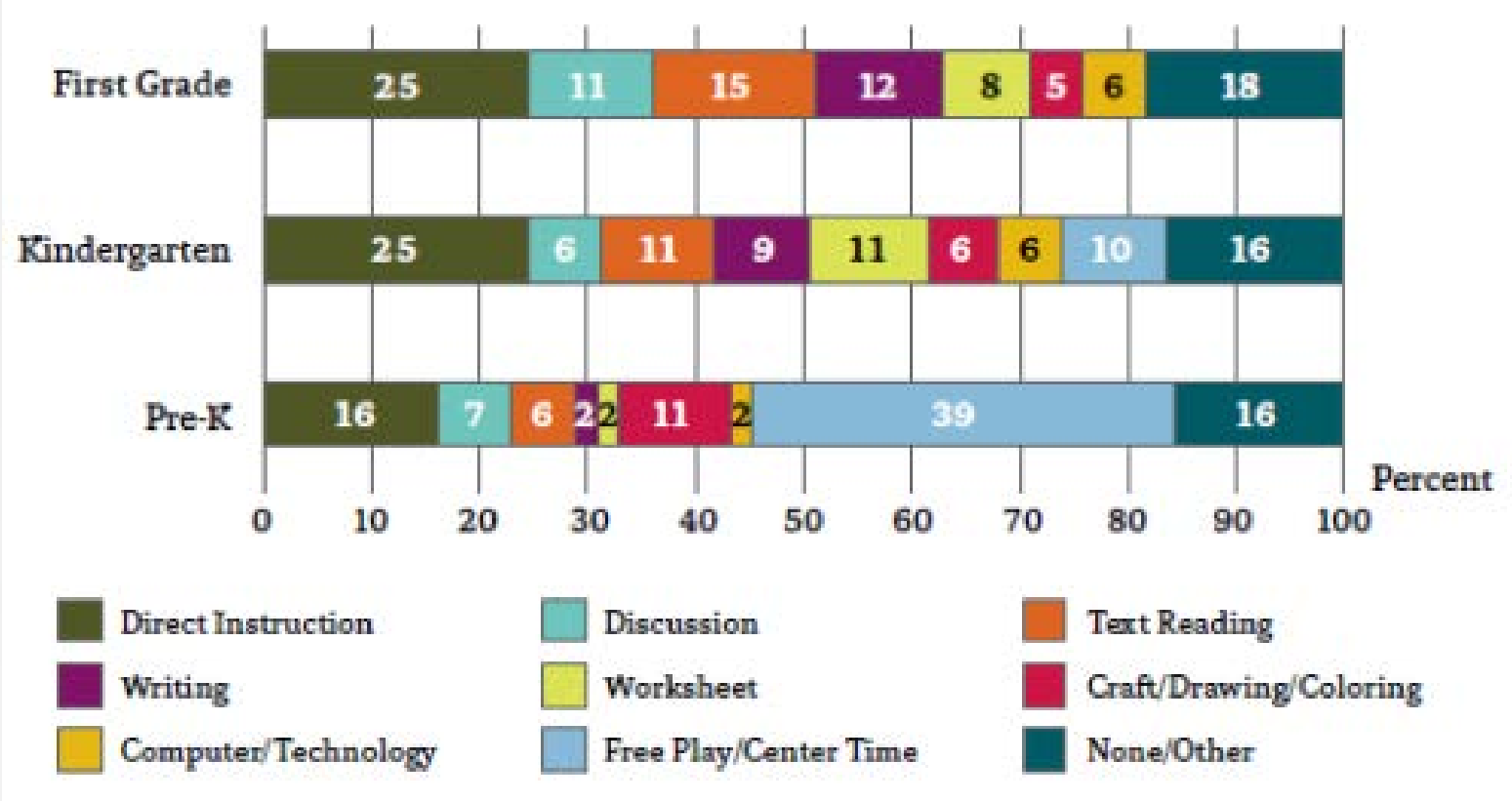


# Promoting Positive Transitions: Alignment of Experiences



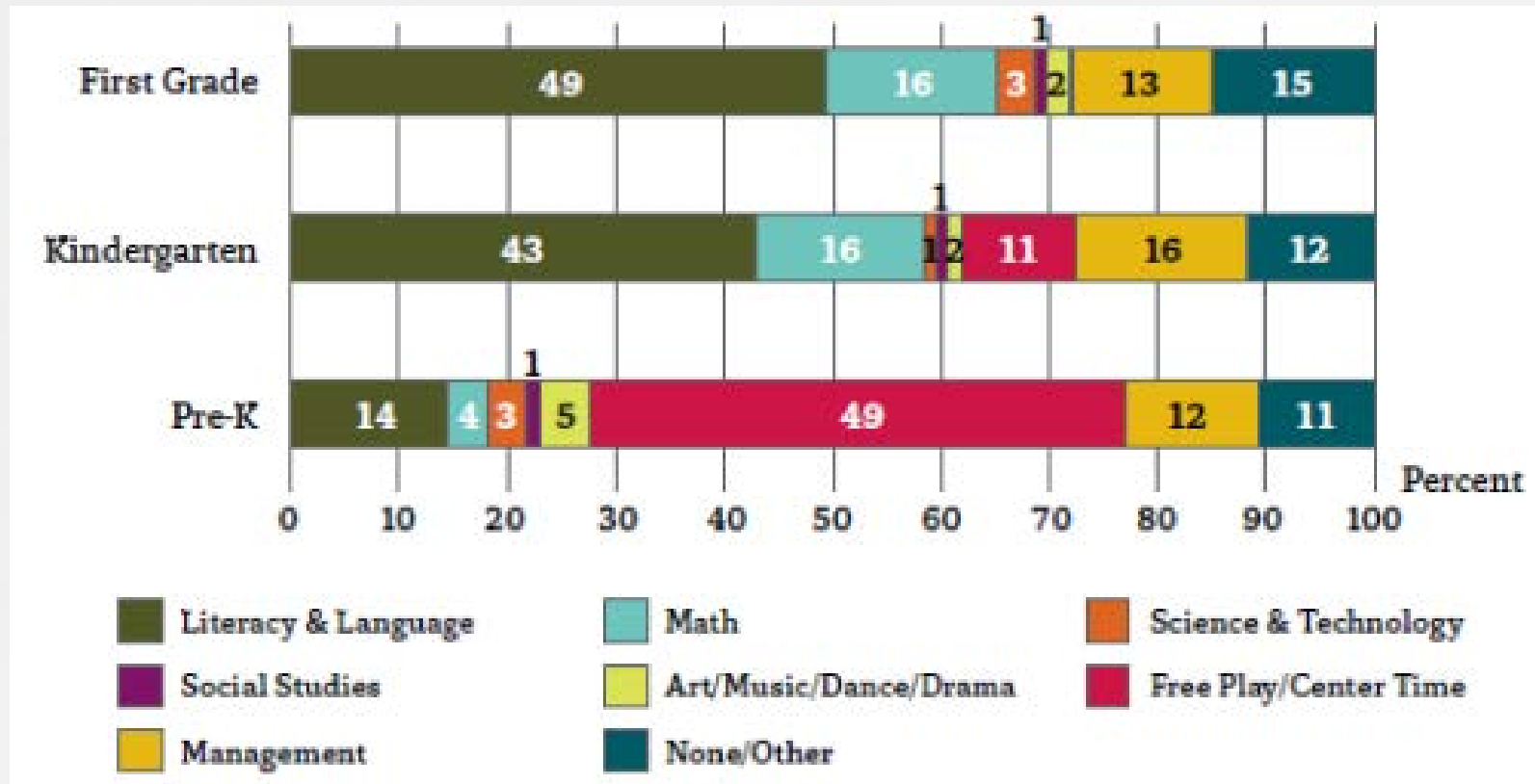
Justice et al., 2020 CCEC White Paper

# Promoting Positive Transitions: Alignment of Experiences



Justice et al., 2020 CCEC White Paper

# Promoting Positive Transitions: Alignment of Experiences



Justice et al., 2020 CCEC White Paper

# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Alignment of Classroom Experiences**

- Consistent with evidence from other Early Learning Network projects (e.g., Vitiello et al., 2020)
  - Even those that focused on district-based pre-k programs
- Does more alignment across classroom experiences lead to better outcomes (e.g., more academic success)?
  - We don't know

# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Alignment of Classroom Experiences**

- How to solve?
  - Vertical alignment (across grades)
- *Focus on Early Learning in Boston* (McCormick et al., 2020)
  - Explicit focus on vertical alignment from PK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade
  - Increase PK instructional strategies in K-2 (small groups and centers)
  - Big investment in supports for this, but still many challenges
- This dependent on the systems working together!



# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Engaging Families**

- **Increasing family engagement can help support and prepare children and families for the increased expectations associated with kindergarten.**
  - **Alignment between home and school environments**
  - **Better communication about issues children may be having**
  - **More positive interactions with adults**

Purtell et al., under review

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# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Engaging Families**

- **How do we increase connections between families and schools during the transition?**
  - **Start prior to kindergarten**
  - **Focus on building communication and relationships**
  - **Ways to promote continuity across transition**

Purtell et al., under review

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# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Engaging Families**

- **Enhancing the Preschool Classroom**
  - Engaging parents in activities designed to prepare for transition
  - Increasing communication from preschool teachers to parents
  - Creating classroom opportunities for children to prepare
    - Books on transition
    - Visits to elementary school
    - Playgroups with children who will be attending same elementary school

Purtell et al., under review

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# Promoting Positive Transitions: Engaging Families

- Engaging with families through home visiting
  - 9 home visits from start of preschool year through middle of kindergarten year
  - Focused on building connections (as opposed to skills focus)
  - Home visitors work with families and with schools

Purtell et al., under review

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# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Engaging Families**

- **Designed to help families who traditionally face barriers to engagement with children's schooling**
  - **Logistical (time, transportation etc.)**
  - **Racial and linguistic (challenges of building relationships with children's teachers)**
  - **Child-related (e.g., behavior problems)**

Purtell et al., under review

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# **Promoting Positive Transitions: Engaging Families**

- **Does it work?**
  - **We don't know...yet**
- **Implemented across multiple communities in Ohio**
  - **52 classrooms**
  - **391 children (avg. age=55 months at start of program)**
    - **55% boys**
    - **15% had IEP**
    - **44% African American, 30% White, 11% Hispanic, 15% Multiracial or Other**
    - **78% had household incomes below \$40,000**

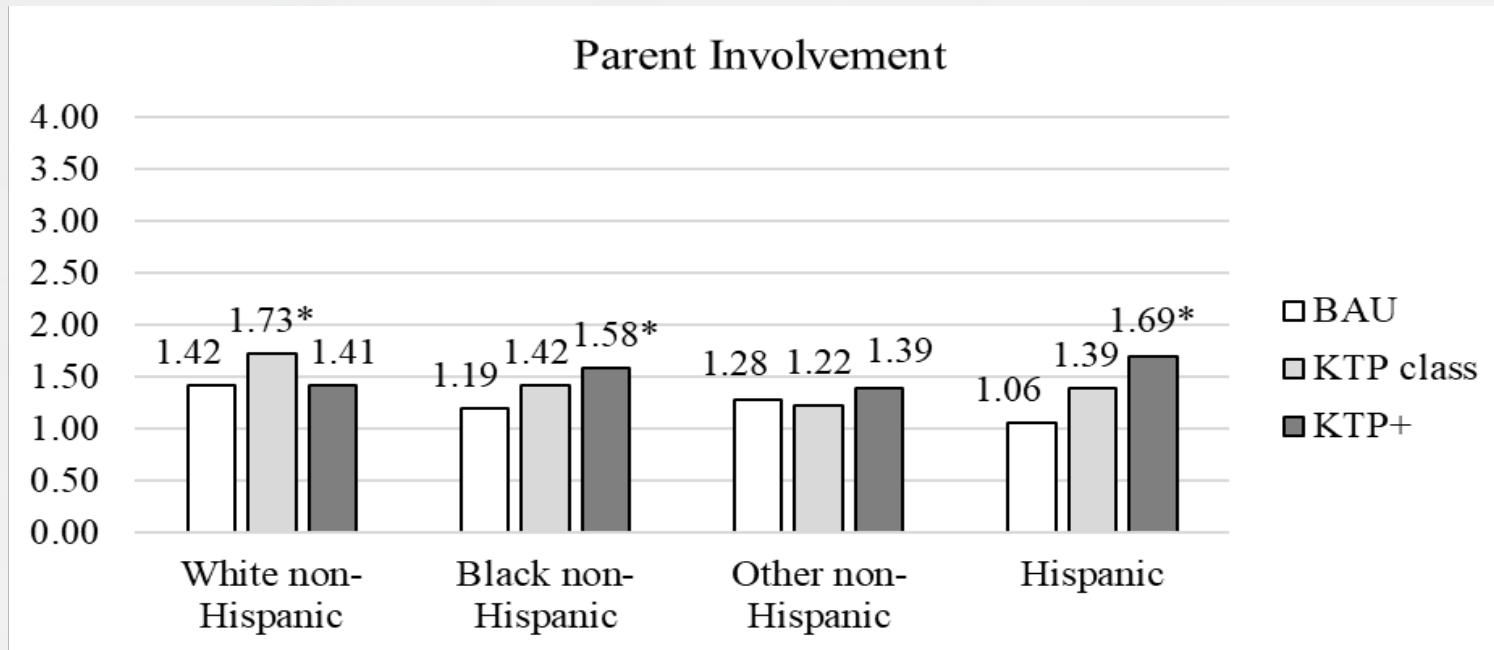
Purtell et al., under review

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# Promoting Positive Transitions: Engaging Families

- Teacher reports of parent involvement



Teachers also reported better relationships and more positive perceptions of parental values with Hispanic parents participating in KTP+.

Initial evidence that our theory of change is working...more to come!

Purtell et al., under review



# The Future of the Kindergarten Transition

- Connections
- Classroom experiences
- Creativity



# The Future of the Kindergarten Transition

- **Connections with families**
  - Needed more now than ever
  - Increased family trauma due to COVID-19
  - Heightened racial tensions in our country
  
- **Connections across system**
  - Prime policy moment



# The Future of the Kindergarten Transition

- **Classroom experiences**
  - How can we ensure that children's experiences in preschool and kindergarten are developmentally appropriate AND do not increase transition challenges?
- **Communication across higher-level systems**



# The Future of the Kindergarten Transition

- **Creativity**
  - Need for creative solutions to emerge
  - Professional development that brings elementary teachers and teachers across preschool sectors in a community together
  - Adjusting the initial months of kindergarten to ease transition
  - Connect with families early in meaningful ways



# **Funding Support**

## **IES Grants:**

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# Questions

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Thank you!

