A Quantitative Synthesis of Family-School Engagement Interventions: A Preliminary Examination in Early Childhood

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Abstract

Family-school engagement in early childhood encourages positive child outcomes and helps parents feel valued in promoting their children's learning and development. The purpose of this poster is to (1) explore the state-of-the science of early childhood family engagement intervention research, and (2) examine the prevalence of specific early childhood family engagement strategies in the empirical research. Results may suggest directions for the field regarding the nature and efficacy of early childhood family interventions.

Introduction

- Unequivocally, children benefit when families are engaged in their education (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

- Positive interactions between parents and children's care providers are predictive of important cognitive (e.g., language), social-emotional (e.g., relationship), and behavioral (e.g., compliance) outcomes for children (Elicker, Wen, Kwon, & Sprague, 2013).

- Establishing family-school engagement practices during early childhood may prepare parents to develop valuable and constructive relationships with both their children and their children's care providers during early childhood and beyond.

- Family-school engagement in early childhood positions families to feel valued in ways that acknowledge and support their role in their child's development and learning.

- Despite the benefits for both children and parents when families become engaged during early childhood, few studies have systematically examined the prevalence of family-school engagement interventions.

- Furthermore, past research has primarily focused on exploring effects for academic outcomes relative to other important child outcomes, and has not differentiated between *parent involvement* interventions (focused on activities) and *family-school partnership* interventions (focused on relationships).

- *Parent involvement models* are defined as programs emphasizing the participation of significant caregivers in activities promoting the educational process of children to support their academic and social well-being (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005).
  - Parent involvement focuses on *structure*, and what each system (home and school) does in isolation (e.g., home literacy practices, Jordan et al., 2000; communications about school, Kelley & McCain, 1995; household rules and routines, Webster-Stratton et al., 2001).
  - *Structural approaches* focus on what activities parents do, typically in response to directives or suggestions made by educators in a one-directional manner.
  - An evidenced-based parental involvement program, the *Families and Schools Together* (FAST) program, educates and empowers parents through home visits, weekly meetings, and parent-child activities to improve parental involvement and child behavior (Kratochwill, McDonald, Levin, Bear-Tibbetts, & Demaray, 2004; Kratochwill, McDonald, Levin, Scalia, & Coover, 2009).

- *Family-school partnerships* are distinct from parent involvement. They are child-focused approaches wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Downer & Myers, 2010; Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2010).
  - Family-school partnership models emphasize the bidirectional *relationship* between families and schools, and purport to enhance student outcomes through the development of cross-system supports and continuities across settings.
  - Distinct from structural approaches, *relational approaches* are collaboratively constructed with parents and early childhood providers jointly, determining both what and how parents can be meaningfully engaged and supportive of their child's learning.
  - Designed to address both parent-child and parent-teacher relationships, the *Getting Ready Project* uses both conjoint and triadic consultation to foster parent engagement and improve child outcomes, such as language development, academics, and social-emotional competence (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, & Kupzyk, 2010; Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011).

Research Questions:

(1) What is the prevalence of research on early childhood parental involvement and family-school partnership interventions?

(2) What specific strategies are utilized and examined in early childhood family-school engagement intervention research?

(3) Which specific *structural* and *relational* approaches are being used in family-school engagement intervention early childhood research?

Methods

Sample
- Intervention studies involving parent involvement and family-school partnerships during early childhood were selected using reference databases, hand searches of journals and cited references (*n* = 55).

Study Selection
- A broad search of the literature yielded over 14,000 abstracts
  - Multiple parameters were used to identify the relevant literature in multiple databases (e.g., ERIC, PsycINFO) from 2001-2011.
- Abstracts were coded by researchers, and studies that meet the following criteria for inclusion were retrieved:
  - Investigated parent involvement (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005) or family-school partnership (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) interventions among children in grade 12 or younger*; and
  - Presented outcomes for children, parents, teachers, schools, communities, or partnerships
    - The current study is a subsample consisting of early childhood studies from birth to age 8.

Coding Variables
- Studies were coded based on:
  - Sample and setting characteristics
  - Intervention type
  - Parent involvement or family-school partnership
  - Structural (e.g., behavior and/or emotion management) and/or relational (e.g., parent-child relationship quality) components of the intervention
  - Outcomes (e.g., reading competency, child behaviors)

Coding Procedures
- Six trained individuals coded the studies, with 15% of the studies coded by two or more coders.
- Regular meetings were held to address inter-rater reliability concerns including questions that arose from the coding process, discrepancies, and consensus among coders.

Table 1: Categorization and Percentages of Demographic Variables (*n* = 55)

| Student Characteristics	Location	Socioeconomic Status	Classroom Type
• At Risk (16%)	• Urban (35%)	• Low (29%)	• Regular Education (71%)
• Externalizing Behaviors (10%)	• Suburban (<1%)	• Middle (7%)	• Head Start (19%)
• Pervasive Developmental Delay (10%)	• Rural (7%)	• Heterogeneous (15%)	• Not Reported (10%)
• ADHD (5%)	• Heterogeneous (10%)	• Not Reported (49%)	
• English Language Learner (4%)	• Not Reported (47%)		
• Oppositional Defiant Disorder (2%)			
• Learning Deficit (2%)			
• Underachieving/below grade level (2%)			
• Not Reported (51%)			

Results

Research Question 1:

What is the prevalence of research on early childhood parental involvement and family-school partnership interventions?

- Parental involvement interventions were much more likely to be used in comparison to family-school partnership interventions regardless of age.

Figure 1- Number of Parental Involvement and Family-School Partnership Studies during Early Childhood (Overall) and Across Specific Age Ranges*
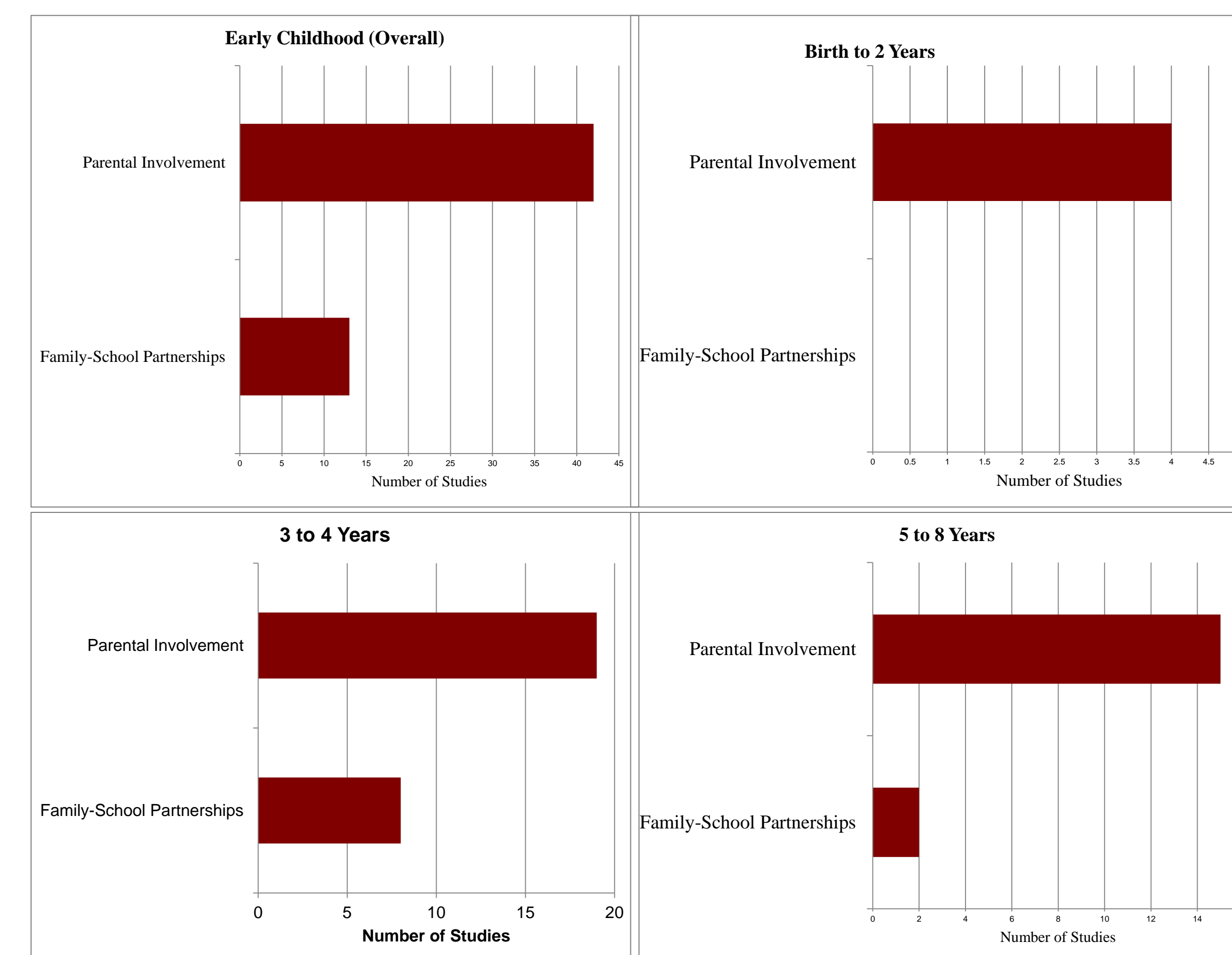
*note differing X-axes across age ranges

Research Question 2:

What specific strategies are utilized and examined in early childhood family-school engagement intervention research?

- Parent education and/or training strategies were predominantly represented in studies regardless of age.
- Strategies expand beyond parent education and/or training and parent-child activities at age 2.

Figure 2- Percentage of Specific Strategies in Early Childhood (Overall) and Across Specific Age Ranges
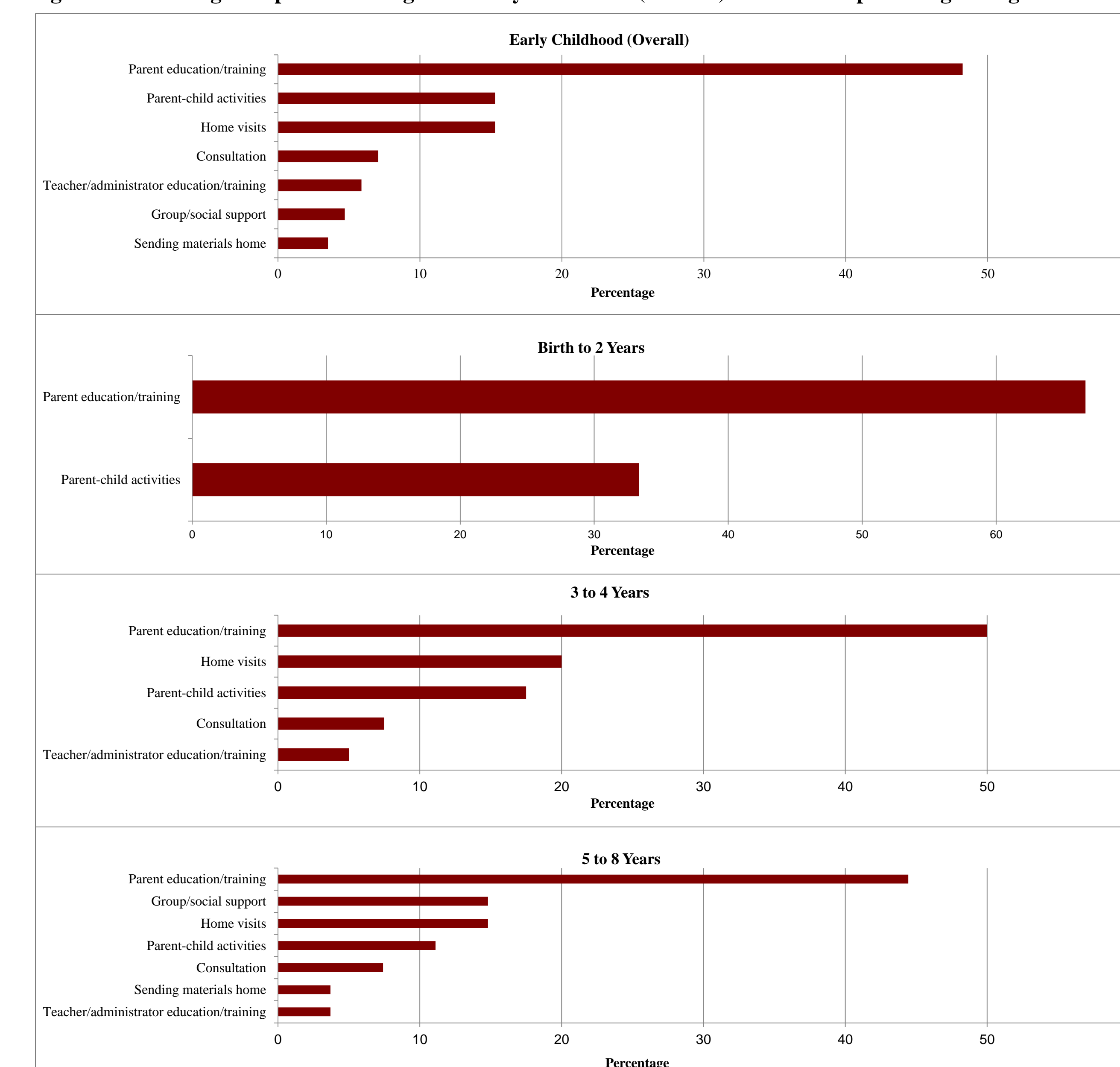
Research Question 3:

Which specific *structural* and *relational* components are being used in family-school engagement intervention research across early childhood?

- In terms of structural components, studies primarily seem to investigate practices related to behavior and literacy.
- Nearly half of relational components investigated in studies are exploring parent-child relational qualities and over 10% are examining conjoint practices, suggesting a collaborative relationship.

Figure 3: Percentage of Structural and Relational Components used in Family Engagement Interventions in Early Childhood
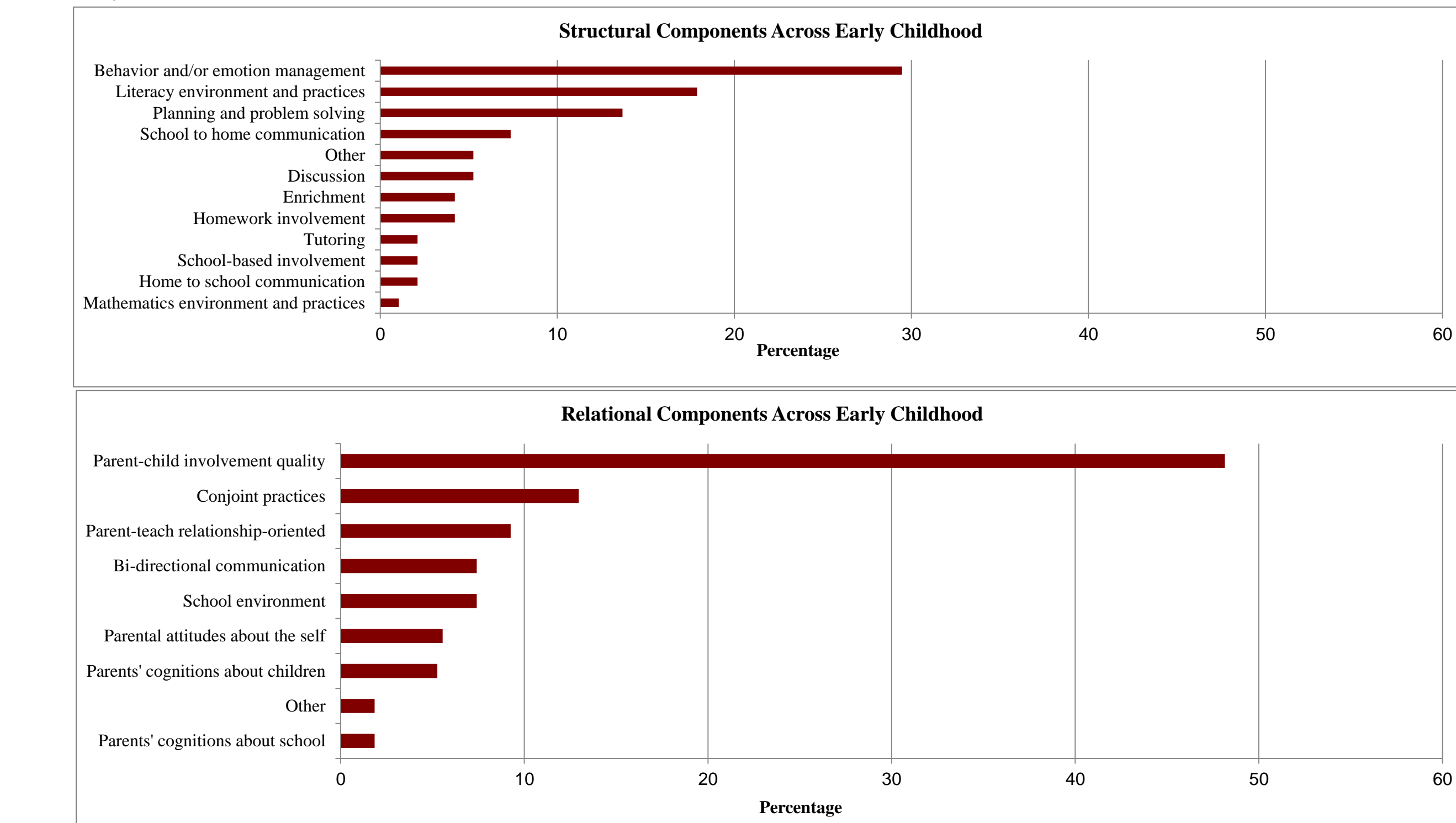
Discussion

- A lack of family-school partnership interventions across all age groups indicates a dire need for collaborative programs between families and schools in early childhood.
- Early childhood studies are scarce in rural areas, signifying a need for future research in rural areas.
- No coded studies showcased home visits for children from birth to age 2. This unanticipated finding may be due to the incomplete coding of studies to date.
- After age 2, many different types of strategies are utilized and explored in family-school intervention research in comparison to studies exploring interventions for children from birth to age 2.
- With the exception of parent-child involvement quality, current practices are lacking important relational components (e.g., conjoint practices, improving parental competence) that have shown to be highly effective (Kim, Sheridan, Koziol, 2012, Knoche et al., 2014); .
- With an understanding of existing effective strategies and exemplar programs, we can both replicate and expand strategies and programs that directly influence practice in early childhood.
- Our ongoing research will determine the impact of these interventions on children's outcomes, which can directly inform the types of interventions that are most beneficial in practice.
- Furthermore, our meta-analysis is unpacking various types of interventions and determining differential effects of specific approaches, strategies, and components.

Limitations

- Current results are very preliminary and from a much larger data set precluding generalization of results at this time.
- Differing sample sizes of defined age groups makes it challenging to compare results between age groups explored.
- Nearly half of coded studies are not reporting key demographic information (i.e., SES, student characteristics, and location), limiting our ability to capture a complete understanding of existing literature.