Continuity between Home and School: Does it Matter for Children?

LISA KNOCHE, SUSAN SHERIDAN, AMANDA MOEN, RACHEL MEISINGER

Presentation Objectives

- *Define* continuity and its' significance for young children.
- *Describe* a study that focuses on the degree to which the strength of continuity relates to young children's school readiness.
- *Suggest* implications for practice and policy.

INTRODUCTION

The environments within which children grow and develop have significant influences on their long-term developmental outcomes.

In the early years, experiences and relationships within the home environment are particularly salient in shaping skills important for learning and adaptive functioning.

Likewise, formal early childhood educational programs are available to some children, and these programs exert influence on their development.

- Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) posits that in addition to the influences of the immediate home and school settings (i.e., microsystems), the quality of the relationships and match between microsystems (i.e., mesosystem) affects a child's ability to navigate experiences and fully benefit from exposure and opportunity.

- That is, whereas the importance of exposure to stimulation and affection (for example) in one setting is important, theory suggests that both the ***accumulation*** and ***continuity*** of developmental opportunities across settings is optimal.

There is a cumulative effect on children's development and learning when supports and resources are provided across multiple caregivers and systems (Crosnoe, Leventhal, Wirth, Pierce, & Pianta, 2010).

Continuity facilitates successful adaptation to school and promotes positive developmental trajectories (Barbarin, Downer, Odom, & Head, 2010; Crosnoe, Leventhal, Wirth, Pierce, & Pianta, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000)

- Continuity can be established in terms of developmental expectations and targets; schedules and routines; values and priorities; and relationships among caregivers.
- Key to continuity of experience is a planful, intentional effort to bridge the important microsystems in a child's life (home and school) and strengthen relationships among them.
- Discontinuity can have a negative impact on children's socialization and academic performance (Barbarin, Downer, Odom, & Head, 2010; Hansen, 1986).

The Parent-Teacher (Provider) Relationship is one aspect of Continuity.

- Children tend to do better in school and like school more when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

- The quality of a parent's relationship with their child's teacher and school personnel is a valid indicator of a successful transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 1999).

Purpose of Current Study and Research Questions

- Few studies have validated the operational role of continuity and cross-system relationships in young children's wellbeing.

- To what degree does continuity or "match" across home and school predict young children's school readiness?
  - *Specifically, when it comes to relationships, how does the coherence of parent and teacher perspectives relate to preschool children's language and school readiness?*

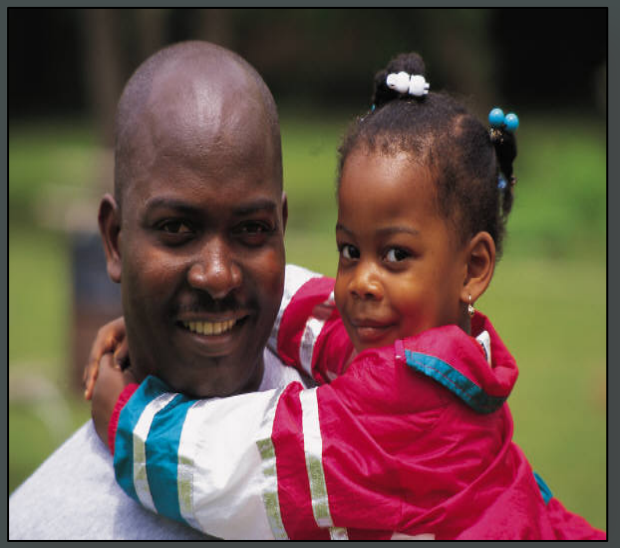
PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP

STUDY METHODS

Study Context

- Data collected as part of large-scale, federally-funded intervention study, Getting Ready.
- Baseline data utilized for analyses.
- Publically-funded preschool classrooms
  - 76 rural preschool classrooms
  - Part-day, part-year, center-based services
  - One- and two-sessions/daily

Sample: Children/Families



- Preschool children/families (N=266) in several communities in Nebraska.
- Participated in public school settings; many children were eligible due to low-income status.
- Screening procedures
  - DIAL $\leq$ 90 on social/emotional, language or concepts
- Once selected, individual family data collection meeting with research assistant two times each academic year. Baseline data utilized for analyses.

	Child (N = 266)	Parent (N = 266)
Age	Mean = 3.63 years	Mean = 30.87 years
Race		
White	65%	81%
Black/African American	4%	3%
American Indian	2%	3%
Asian	.4%	1%
Other race	11%	9%
Two or more races	12%	3%
Ethnicity	30% Hispanic	24% Hispanic
Gender	56% Male; 44% Female	88% mothers; 12% fathers

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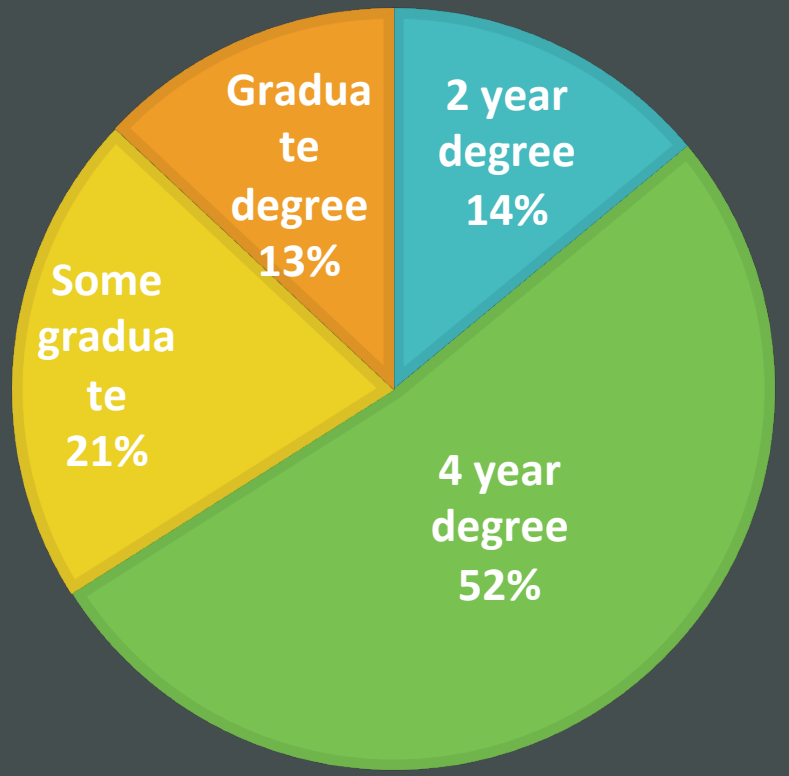
- 40% of parents reported having a developmental concern about their child.

Sample: Teachers

- Preschool teachers (N=93) in communities in Nebraska.

74% of teachers have an early childhood teaching endorsement or certificate



	Teachers (N = 93)
Age	Mean = 36.24 years
Race	
White	94%
Black/African American	0%
White, Hispanic or Latino	2%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	1%
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Ethnicity	3% Hispanic
Gender	1% Male; 99% Female

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- 9.07 years is the average classroom teaching experience; 48% have at least 7 years teaching experience
- 9.38 years is the average Early Childhood teaching experience; 50% have at least 7 years teaching experience

Measures of Interest: Child Outcomes

Construct	Measure	Description	Scale
Receptive Language (English)	Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-IV	• Measures receptive vocabulary • Gauges precision and breadth of English vocabulary	Mean score of 100 *SD* = 15
Expressive Language (English)	Expressive Vocabulary Test-II	• Assesses expressive vocabulary and word retrieval	Mean score of 100 *SD* = 15
School Readiness	Bracken Basic Concept Scale-III	• Assesses concept development • Determine how familiar children are with concepts taught by parents and teachers to prepare for formal education	Mean score of 100 *SD* = 15

Measures of Interest: Parent-Teacher Relationship & Continuity

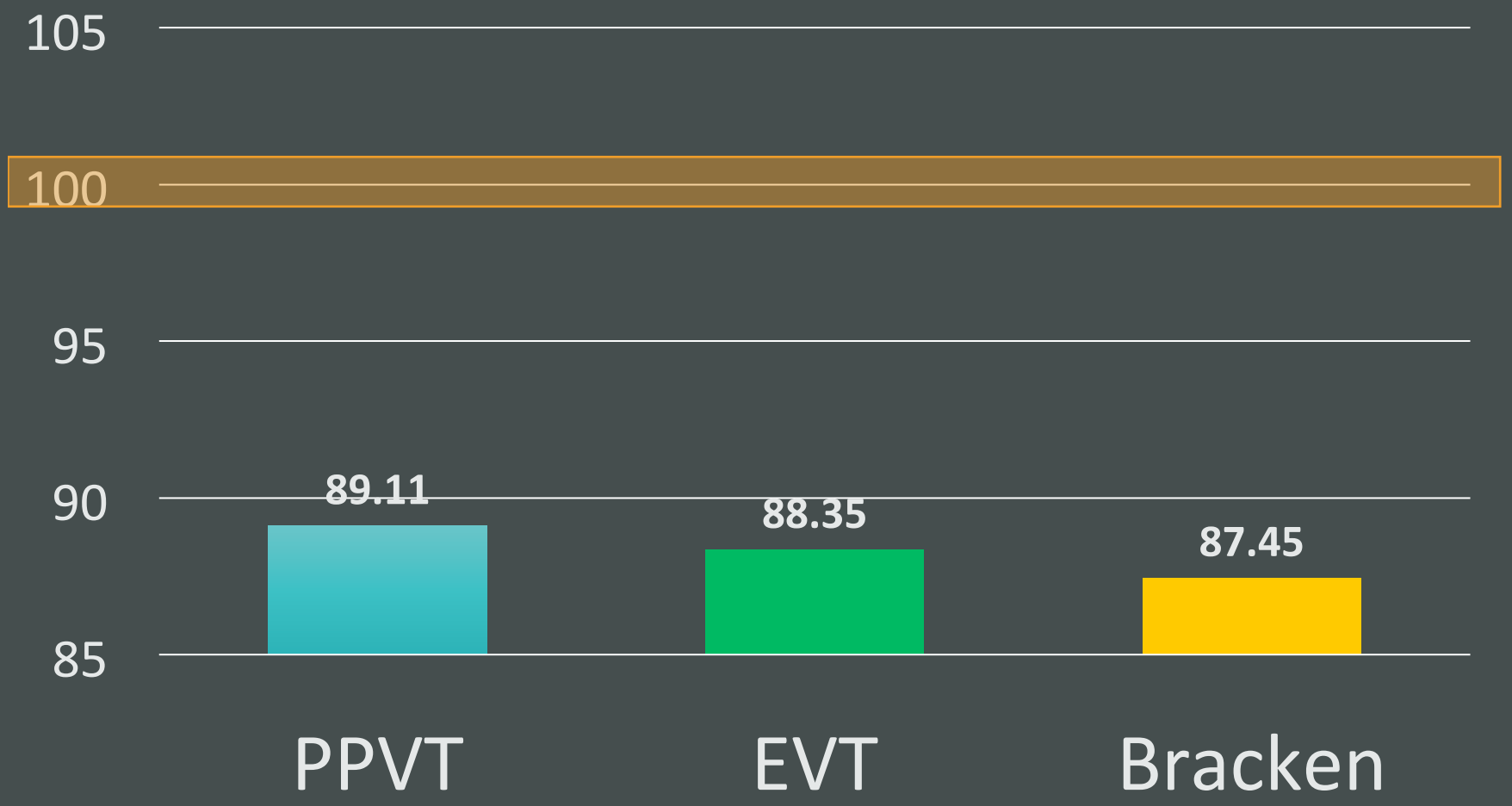
Construct	Measure	Description
Parent-Teacher Relationship	Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale-II (PTRS) *parent- and teacher-report*	Contains 24 items that measure two constructs: *Joining* (sense of affiliation and support; dependability; shared expectations/beliefs about the child and each other; bi-directional communication of information and feelings); *Communication* (shared power; flexible problem solving; changeable roles) Combined into a single, total score
Continuity	Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale-II (PTRS)	Interaction between parent and teacher perspectives

RESULTS

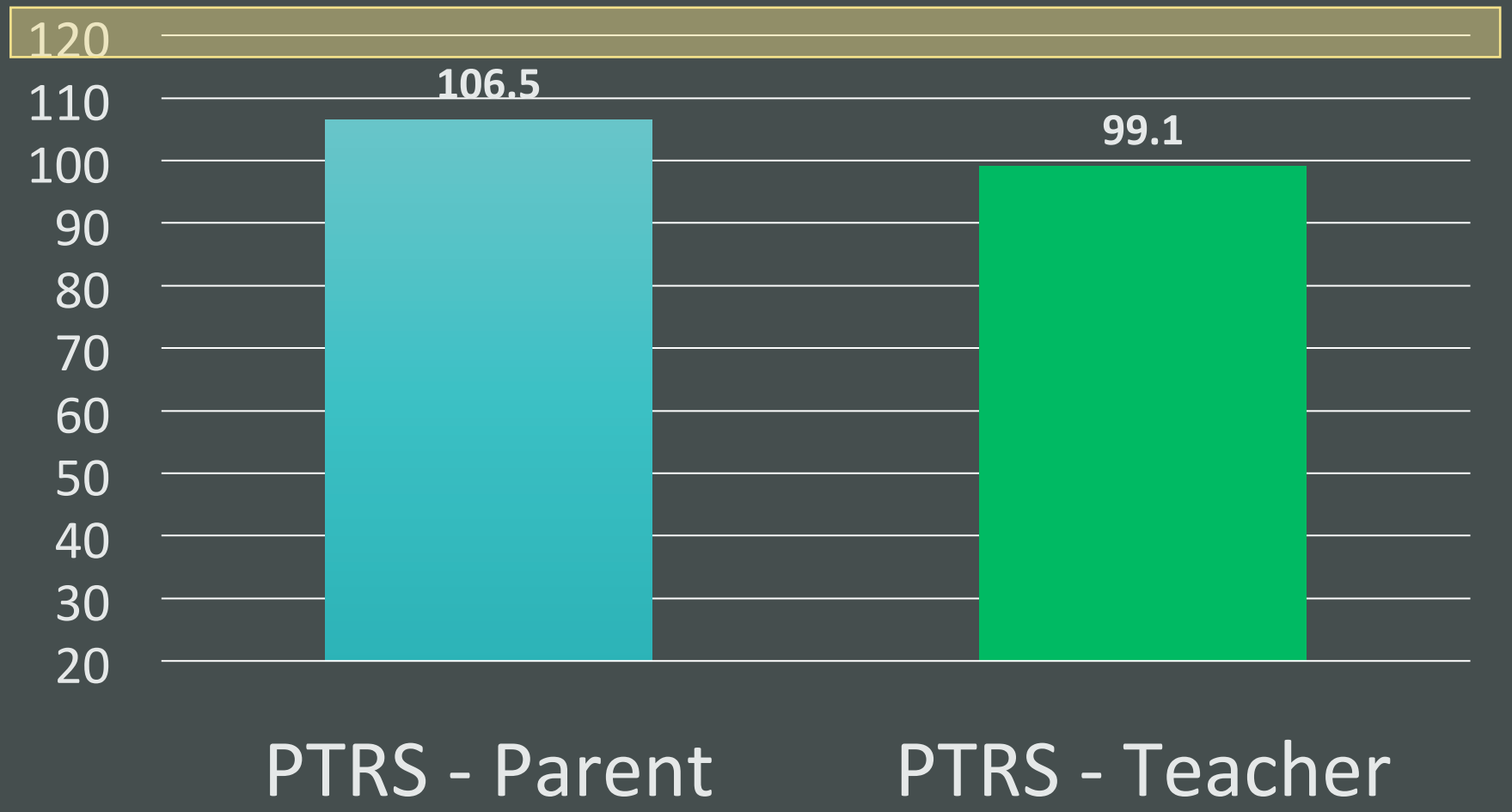
TO WHAT DEGREE DOES CONTINUITY OR “MATCH” ACROSS HOME AND SCHOOL PREDICT YOUNG CHILDREN’S SCHOOL READINESS?

Specifically, when it comes to relationships, how does the coherence of parent and teacher perspectives relate to preschool children’s language and school readiness?

Average Skills – Preschool Entry



Average Ratings – Preschool Entry



Data Analysis

To what degree does continuity or "match" across home and school predict young children's school readiness?

- 266 baseline cases; collected at beginning of year (within first 6 weeks of school)
- Multi-level modeling
  - Interaction between family report on PTRS x teacher report on PTRS
  - Statistically significant effects on three outcomes

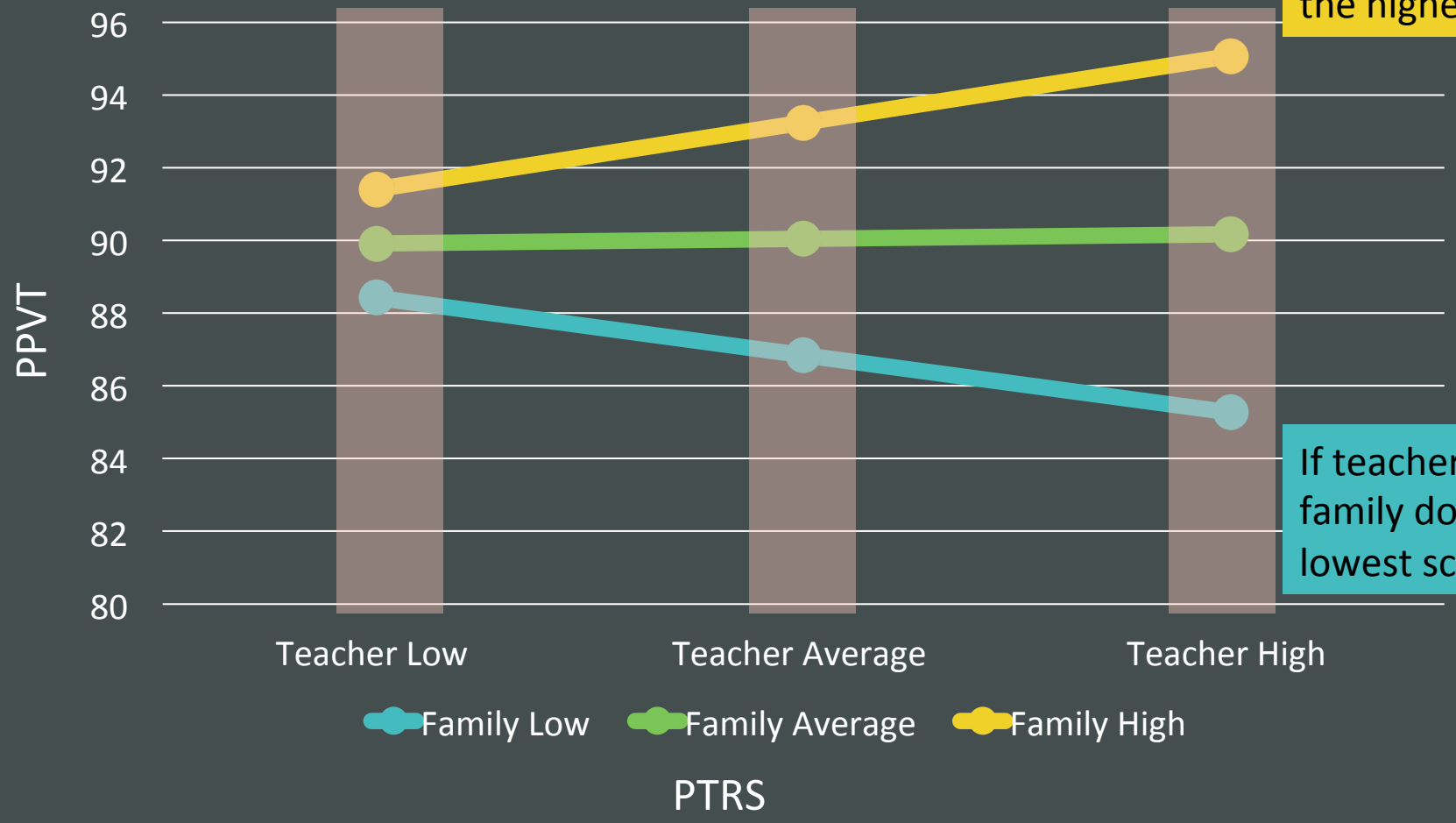
When teachers and parents are consistent in their perspectives about a positive relationship with one another, children benefit relative to inconsistent ratings (e.g., teacher high, parent low).

Receptive language capacity

Expressive language capacity

School Readiness skills

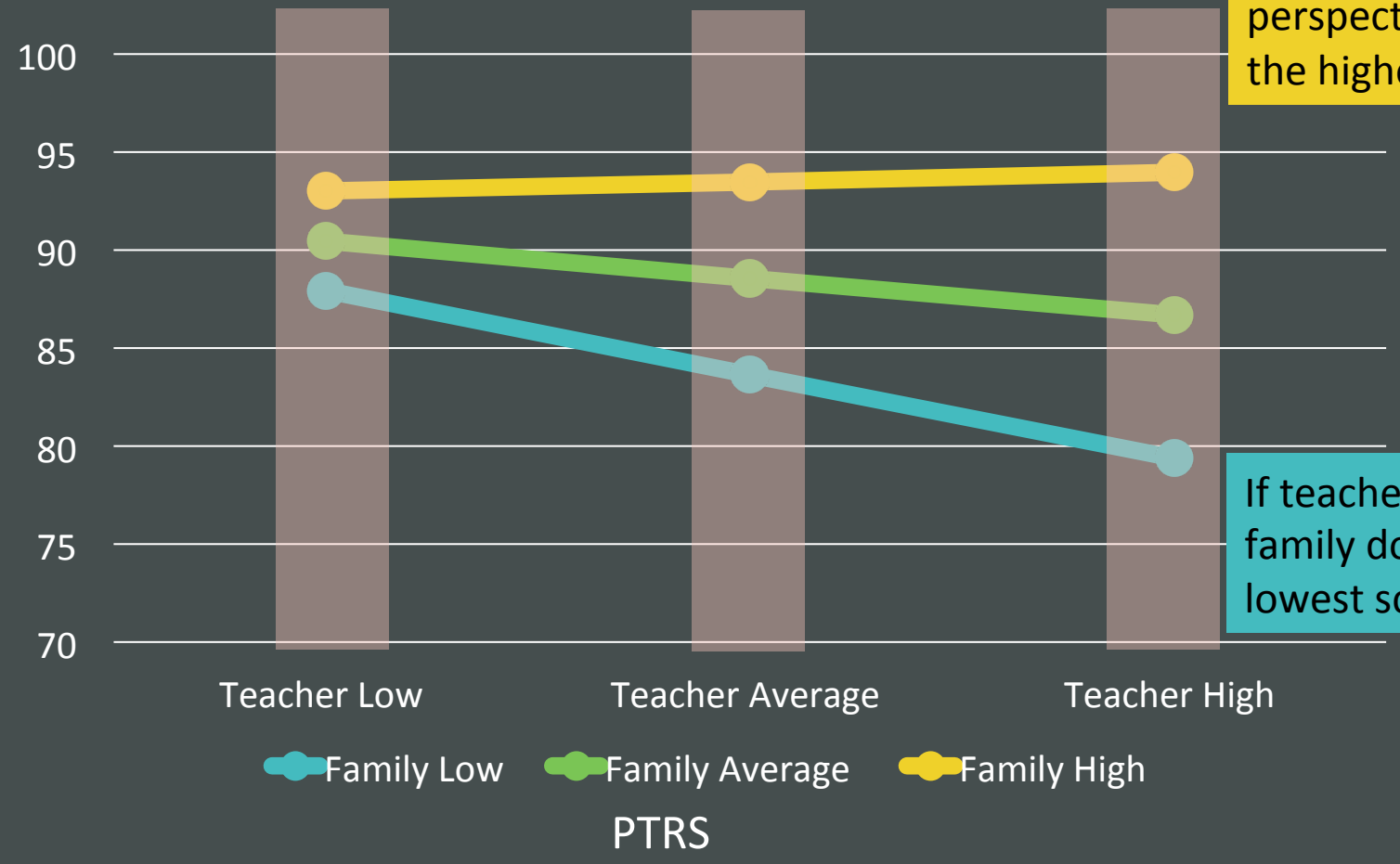
Receptive Language



When teacher perspective and parent perspective are high, children demonstrate the highest estimated outcome on PPVT.

If teacher views relationship as positive, but family does not, children demonstrate lowest scores.

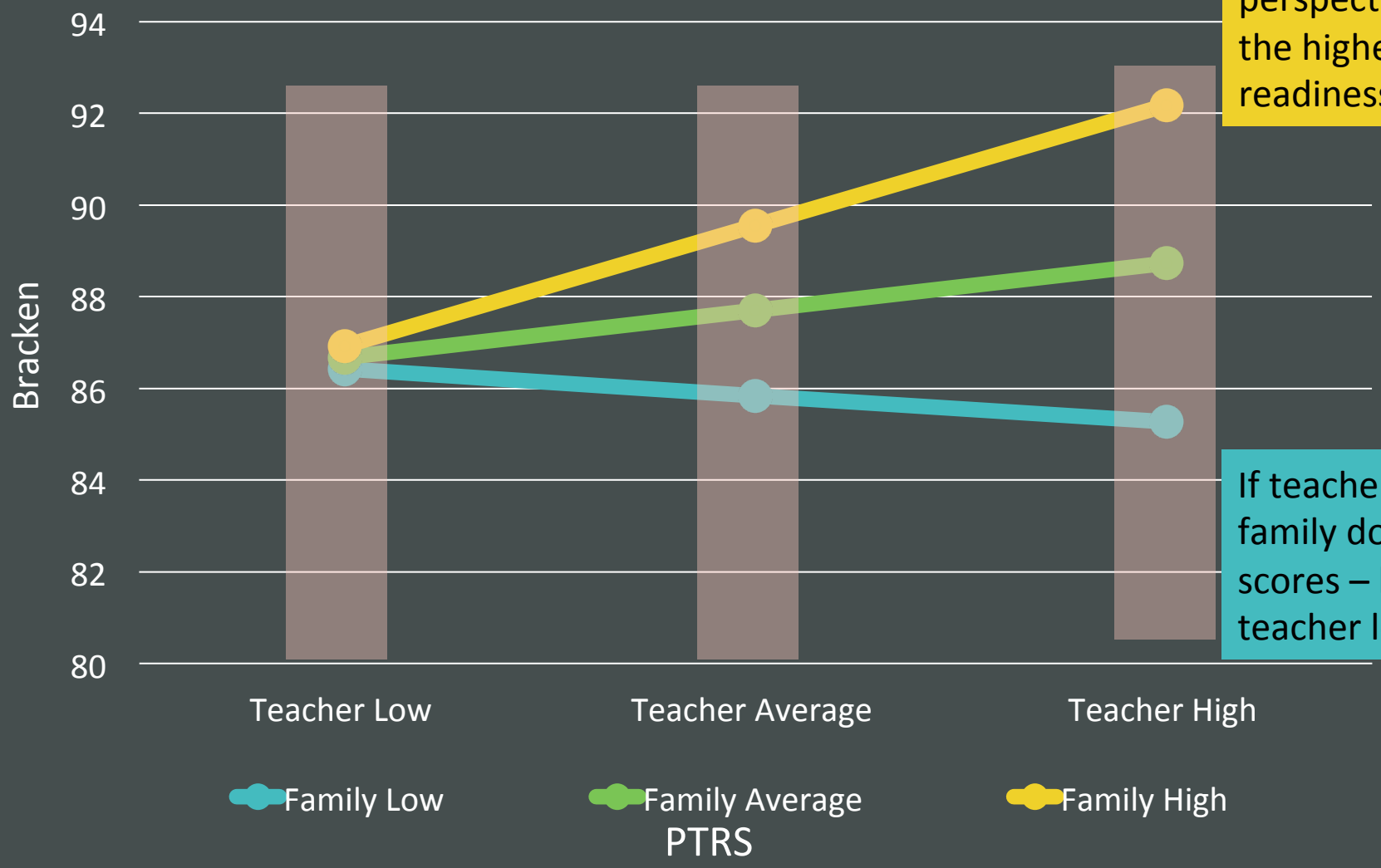
Expressive Language



When teacher perspective and parent perspective are high, children demonstrate the highest estimated outcome on EVT.

If teacher views relationship as positive, but family does not, children demonstrate lowest scores.

School Readiness - Bracken



When teacher perspective and parent perspective are high, children demonstrate the highest estimated outcome on school readiness skills.

If teacher views relationship as positive, but family does not, children demonstrate lower scores – little difference than family low and teacher low.

There is a synergistic effect of relationship quality on children's outcomes. The more positive the parent report of relationship and the more positive the teacher report of relationship, the greater the child's observed developmental outcomes.

Continuities across home and school settings are significant in enhancing developmental outcomes for young children.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Key Take-Away Points

- When preschool teachers and parents of children **both** perceive their relationships with one another to be of high quality and characterized by effective communication and partnership practices, children demonstrate enhanced vocabulary and school readiness skills.

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- When preschool teachers and parents of children **both** perceive their relationships with one another to be of high quality and characterized by effective communication and partnership practices, children demonstrate enhanced vocabulary and school readiness skills.
- The consistency or “match” in teacher and parent perspective regarding their positive relationship is significantly related to children’s outcomes at the earliest stage of children’s preschool experiences (e.g., within the first 6 weeks).

How can this study inform early childhood practice/policy?

- Family engagement is a key focus of many early childhood programs. This study suggests that beyond parent involvement, time invested in ***building the parent-teacher relationship*** will pay off for young children.

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- Family engagement is a key focus of many early childhood programs. This study suggests that beyond parent involvement, time invested in ***building the parent-teacher relationship*** will pay off for young children.
- These efforts must begin early. Visits and meetings that take place at the beginning of the year are critical. Programs are encouraged to approach these parent-teacher interactions with ***relationships in mind.***

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- Teachers and providers need time to focus on relational aspects of their work.
- Interventions to support continuity are available (e.g., Getting Ready) and have demonstrated positive effects on parent-teacher relationships. These require systematic and planful attention to home-school/center continuity.

What additional research is needed to inform or advance early childhood practice and/or policy?

- Additional research is needed to explore other aspects of continuity (e.g., learning materials and classroom environments).
- An in-depth exploration of *how* teachers and parents form relationships and create continuities in early childhood settings is warranted.

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For more information on this and related research studies, please contact …

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