



National Center for **Research** on
Rural Education (R²Ed)

Parent-Teacher Relationships in Early Childhood: A Rural and Non-Rural Comparison

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Behavior Challenges

- Children with social-behavioral problems are at risk for developing long-term, pervasive problems:
 - Low achievement scores and academic grades (Bub, McCartney, & Willett, 2007)
 - Dropping out of high school (Vitaro, Brendgen, Larose, & Tremblay, 2005)
 - School suspension (Reinke, Herman, Petras, & Ialongo, 2008)

Transition to Kindergarten

- Children often experience academic, social, and cultural discontinuities when transitioning into kindergarten (Christenson, 1999).
- More than any other school readiness skill, young children's behavioral problems are rated as most concerning to kindergarten teachers (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

The Ecology of Child Development

- Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) emphasizes the importance of the environments in which children learn and grow and the relationships between those systems.
- Optimal development occurs when:
 - Environments are conducive to social, behavioral, and academic success
 - Coordination exists between the key environments (home-school partnerships)

Parent-Teacher Relationships

- The affective quality of parent-teacher connections
 - Quality is characterized by trust, mutuality, affiliation, support, shared values, and shared expectations and beliefs about each other and the child (Vickers & Minke, 1995).
- Positive parent-teacher relationships alleviate the negative effects of behavior problems (Kim, Sheridan, Kwon, & Koziol, 2013).
- Positive parent-teacher relationships are linked to positive outcomes for children, teachers, and parents (Christenson & Reschly, 2009).

Community Type

- Community characteristics are related to child outcomes and vary across community types:
 - Access to schools and support services (Phillips et al., 2007)
 - Overlapping relationships (Larson & Corrigan, 2010)
 - Cultural views of behavior problems and parenting (Dempster, Wildman, & Keating, 2012)
- The association between community type and parent-teacher relationships for kindergarten student is unknown.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to:

- Examine differences between parent-teacher relationships across rural and non-rural communities for students with behavior problems at school entry.
- Evaluate differences in parental perceptions of efficacy and competency regarding home-school partnerships across rural and non-rural communities.

Participants

- Participants were drawn from an existing database of two randomized controlled trials
- 116 kindergarten students *identified as having disruptive behaviors* and their parents
- 62 teachers
- 40 Midwestern schools
 - 10 mid-size non-rural schools
 - 30 rural schools

Student Demographics

		Rural (n=66)	Non – Rural (n=50)
Mean (SD) Age		5.53 (.54)	5.23 (.48)
Gender (Male)		84%	100%
Disability Status		40%	54%
Ethnicity	White, non-Hispanic	84%	77%
	African American	2%	4%
	Hispanic/Latino	6%	6%
	Other	8%	13%
Risk Factors	0	28%	50%
	1	49%	36%
	2	10%	12%
	3 or more	13%	2%

Parent Demographics

		Rural (n=66)	Non – Rural (n=50)
Free/Reduced Lunch (Eligible)		69%	36%
Gender	Male	10%	11%
	Female	90%	89%
Education	Less than HS diploma	11%	9%
	HS diploma or GED	10%	11%
	Some college	44%	25%
	College degree	29%	38%
	Graduate coursework/ Degree	6%	17%

Teacher Demographics

		Rural (n=39)	Non – Rural (n=23)
Gender (female)		97%	100%
Ethnicity (white)		100%	93%
Education	College degree	28%	43%
	Some graduate coursework	46%	48%
	Graduate degree	26%	9%
Mean (SD) Years of Experience		14.1 (13.8)	7.6 (8.9)
Certification	General education	87%	78%
	General & Special education	23%	22%

Measures

- Parent and Teacher relationship quality
 - *Parent-Teacher Relationship scale (PTRS)*
- Parental Efficacy
 - *Parent Efficacy for Helping the Child Succeed in School (PEHCSS)*
- Parent Competence in Problem Solving
 - *Parent Perceived Competence in Problem Solving (PPPSE)*

Procedure

- All measures collected via written questionnaires.
- Community type reported on NCES website.
 - Rural = 50,000 or less
 - Non-Rural = greater than 50,000

Analyses

- A multilevel model of students nested within classrooms and classroom nested within schools was conducted to examine:
 - Differences in perceptions of parent-teacher relationship quality across rural and non-rural communities for students with behavior problems at school entry.
 - Differences in parental perceptions of efficacy and competency regarding home-school partnerships across rural and non-rural communities for students with behavior problems at school entry.

Results: Teacher Report

Non-rural teachers reported significantly higher quality parent-teacher relationships relative to teachers in rural settings ($p=.04$).

	Group	Mean (SD)
Teacher PTRS Ratings	Non-Rural (n=48)	4.31 (.51)
	Rural (n=66)	3.90 (.64)

Results: Parent Report

There were no significant differences between non-rural and rural settings in parent-reported parent-teacher relationship quality, parent efficacy for helping the child succeed in school, and parent competence in problem solving.

		Group	Mean (SD)
Parent Ratings	PTRS	Non-Rural (n=46)	4.60 (.41)
		Rural (n=65)	4.38 (.56)
	PPE	Non-Rural (n=46)	4.75 (.71)
		Rural (n=64)	4.66 (.58)
	PPPSE	Non-Rural (n=45)	4.50 (.68)
		Rural (n=62)	4.32 (.84)

Discussion: Parent-Teacher Relationships

- Community type predicts teacher-reported parent-teacher relationship quality for students with behavior problems.
 - Non-rural teachers reported significantly higher quality parent-teacher relationships.
 - No significant differences were found for parent-reports of parent-teacher relationship quality.

Discussion: Parent Efficacy and Competence

- Parents, regardless of community settings, believe that they have the ability to positively influence students' development.
- Further, parents recognize their role in children's education is important.

Limitations

- All data are based on informant reports.
 - No direct measures of relationship quality or parent perceptions of efficacy/competency were conducted.
- This study was confined to a single geographic region (i.e., one state and communities along its border).

Future Directions

- Investigation is needed to explain how and why community type relates to parent–teacher relationships.
- Evaluate interventions and community supports in rural communities that may bolster parent-teacher relationships and improve student outcomes.

Implications for Early Childhood Practice

- There are unique challenges in building home-school partnerships in non-urban communities.
- Access to tools and training to augment the skills and competencies of rural and small town teachers in parent-teacher partnership may be needed.
- By creating more opportunities for partnerships, rural schools can support parents' primacy towards improving their children's development.
- Intervention in early childhood to bolster parent-teacher relationships may be effective.

Tips to Partnerize

- Form Relationships
- Create Ways to Become and Stay Engaged
- Communicate Two Ways
- Structure Consistent Opportunities for Learning and Behavior
- Collaborate to Achieve Goals and Solve Problems

Discussion

- What information resulted from this investigation?
- How can information from this study inform or advance early childhood practice?
- How can information from this study inform or advance early childhood public policy?
- What additional research is needed to inform or advance early childhood practice and/or policy?

Take Away Points

- Partnerships between families and schools consistently and substantially benefit young children's development and may be especially important for alleviating the negative effects of behavior problems.
- It is necessary to understand the environmental context (e.g., rural, non-rural) in which family-school partnerships occur.
- This study found significantly lower quality parent-teacher relationships for students with behavior problems in rural communities relative to non-rural communities.
- It is important that education professionals are aware of unique challenges in building home-school partnerships in rural communities.

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