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Abstract

Previous research has highlighted the effectiveness of supporting parents in fostering children's academic and/or social-emotional development in preparation for kindergarten. Considering the emergence of COVID-19 as a risk factor to which all children and parents have been exposed, it is essential to understand parental mental health as it relates to early childhood development. This study utilized mixed methods to examine the experiences and perspectives of parents ($N = 82$) whose children were transitioning into kindergarten during the fall of 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Results indicate that parents' knowledge/confidence in managing their child's transition to kindergarten was inversely associated with their worry during this time and may be a meaningful target for future interventions. Implications regarding how to best support and include parents in early intervention programming prior to kindergarten entry are discussed.

Keywords: *Parents, Self-efficacy, Kindergarten, School Entry, COVID-19*

Parents, regardless of familial and neighborhood resources, are critically important in fostering their children's development, including ensuring that their children are cognitively, socially, and emotionally ready for the transition to kindergarten (Kingston et al., 2013). Parental stress and depression are inversely related to school readiness for their children, such that children whose parents report increased levels of stress and depression are more likely to have difficulties navigating the developmentally important transition to formal schooling in kindergarten (Jeon et al., 2014). Fortunately, parental engagement in

early learning and home learning environments has been found to influence this relation and positively impact school readiness (Baker & Iruka, 2013; Jeon et al., 2014)**.** Therefore, identifying and understanding ways to mitigate and buffer parent stressors and experiences can serve to improve children's transition into kindergarten and, ultimately, many lifelong outcomes (Racine et al., 2018). Not only during the unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic but also in recovering from the effects of this pandemic, there is an urgent need to provide early support and intervention for parents who have children transitioning into kindergarten.

The emergence of COVID-19 can be considered as a risk factor to which all children have been exposed (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020). As such, it is critically important to understand parental mental health and potential protective factors to buffer the adverse effects of the pandemic as they relate to early childhood development and school entry. This study specifically examined parents' perceptions regarding their overall parental self-efficacy, their knowledge and confidence in supporting their child's transition to kindergarten, and their worry about this transition into kindergarten. By obtaining parents' perspectives across these domains, researchers aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the malleable and influential factors that may decrease parents' worry about the transition to kindergarten, thereby buffering parent stressors related to the transition to kindergarten and potentially positively impacting children's school readiness.

COVID-19 Impact

COVID-19 is a novel event that caused school closures not only nationwide but also around the world. School closures due to COVID-19 impacted at least 124,000 U.S. public and private schools, affecting at least 55.1 million students (Education Week, 2020). The sudden disruption of the physical school systems required many parents to fulfill not only the roles of family providers and caregivers but also to become the primary facilitators of their chil-

dren's education. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, parents and caregivers might have also experienced financial hardship and unemployment, a loss of consistent childcare, and challenges with virtual learning, all of which can strain parent-child relationships and increase parental stress (Vivrette, 2021).

Research has shown that parents' perceived stress plays a role in how they view their children's competence and how children perform academically (Bagner et al., 2014). Data collected approximately five weeks after the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic revealed that rates of parental depression and stress were negatively associated with home education outcomes and positively associated with child anxiety (Lee et al., 2021). Thus, mitigating parental stress might be one way to support parents in nurturing positive child development, particularly during the critical and demanding period of a child's transition to kindergarten.

Kindergarten Readiness

School readiness, often also termed kindergarten readiness, is defined as "children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life" (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center [ECLKC], n.d.). Beyond child-specific characteristics, school readiness also has been defined in terms of ready families, ready schools, and ready communities, acknowledging the ecological systems that influence children's development and their ability to successfully navigate the transition into kindergarten and formal schooling (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009). A large body of research highlights the longitudinal predictive power of kindergarten academic and social-emotional outcomes and skill sets on children's subsequent academic trajectory (e.g., Duncan et al., 2007; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Moreover, kindergarten readiness skills and dispositions at age five have also been associated with school dropout risk, mental health, school connectedness, substance abuse risk, and other health outcomes (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020).

Key components of school readiness include children's readiness for school from infancy to school age and families' readiness to support children's development and the transition to school (NAEYC, 2009). Optimal and effective kindergarten transition practices engage the family prior to the start of the kindergarten school year (Early et al., 2001) and target efforts to increase parental involvement (Schulting et al., 2005). Previous research investigating family experiences and involvement specifically during the transition to kindergarten period suggests that families want information about kindergarten readiness, including social-emotional-behavioral and academic expectations in kindergarten along with guidance about what parents can do to help prepare their children for kindergarten (McIntyre et al., 2007). Providing parents with the appropriate knowledge, materials, and tools for how to effectively foster their children's learning at home is associated with enhanced parent involvement and engagement with their children's learning and, in turn, improved children's school readiness skills across academic and social-emotional domains (Marti et al., 2018). However, additional research is needed to investigate parents' needs during the transition to kindergarten while considering the novel COVID-19 context and its residual effects. Additionally, parental self-efficacy has been identified as a key construct associated with parents becoming involved in their child's academic development in the home (Waanders et al., 2007) and at school (Grolnick et al., 1997). COVID-19 and school closures highlighted the need to understand what school-based resources parents require to feel equipped to promote their children's learning at home for kindergarten. This is a critical component of facilitating school readiness.

Importance of Parental Self-Efficacy

Parental self-efficacy (PSE) is the belief in one's ability to parent effectively and confidence to successfully handle problems one's child might experience (Coleman & Karraker, 1998). PSE has been

found to be a key element in healthy functioning in both parents and children, and has been associated with many improved outcomes for children and parents (Albanese et al., 2019; Coleman & Karraker, 1998). Given the detrimental impacts of COVID-19 and adverse circumstances that have arisen as a result of the pandemic, it is critical to understand parental self-efficacy at a pivotal time in a child's development during kindergarten entry. This study aimed to highlight parents' experiences and needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide a deeper understanding of potential factors that might decrease parents' worry about their child's transition to kindergarten. By understanding parents' experiences and needs, researchers hoped to identify factors that could positively influence child and family readiness and decrease parents' worry during this transitional period, both during and after the pandemic.

Study Aims

Recognizing the increased level of stress that many parents have experienced during the pandemic, along with known associations between PSE and later kindergarten readiness, this study was conducted to better understand how to support and include parents in early intervention programming during their child's transition to kindergarten. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the associations between parents' overall self-efficacy, knowledge/confidence about the transition to kindergarten, and parents' worry about the transition to kindergarten?

2. What school-based resources do parents of incoming kindergartners believe would be most supportive to their family as they transition to kindergarten?

Method

Participants and context

A total of $N = 82$ participants provided self-reported parent survey data. Participants were parents from 11 different school districts in California. There was a mean parent age of $M = 39.37$ years ($SD = 6.21$) and child age of $M = 5.26$ years ($SD = 0.39$). The vast majority of participants identified as female ($n = 75$; 91.5%) and as the child's mother ($n = 73$; 89%). 51.2% of participants ($n = 42$) identified as Caucasian/White, 17.1% ($n = 14$) identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 17.1% ($n = 14$) identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 6.1% ($n = 5$) identified as Mixed Race, 3.7% ($n = 3$) identified as Middle Eastern, 2.4% ($n = 2$) identified as African American/Black, 1.2% ($n = 1$) identified as Native American, and 1.2% ($n = 1$) identified as Other. See Table 1 for additional demographic information.

Measures

Parent Self-Efficacy in Managing the Transition to School Scale (PSMTSS)

The PSMTSS is a brief 9-item parent report measure that examines parents' sense of self-efficacy in facilitating a positive transition to kindergarten and elementary school (Giallo et al., 2008). Higher ratings on this measure indicate greater self-efficacy, and the items are aggregated into two overall subscales. The Knowledge and Confidence subscale includes 5 items that refer to parent knowledge and confidence in managing the transition process and supporting their child. A sample item includes, "I feel confident that I can support my child well during this time." The Worry subscale includes 4 items that refer to parent worry and concern about managing the transition period. One item from this subscale states, "I worry about whether I can help my child adjust to his/her new school."

Table 1. *Demographic Information*

Demographic	n (%)	M (SD)
Parent Age		M= 39.37 (SD=6.21)
Child Age		M= 5.26 (SD=0.39)
Parent Gender		
Male	7 (8.5)	
Female	75 (91.5)	
Relationship to Child		
Mother (biological or adoptive)	73 (89.0)	
Father (biological or adoptive)	7 (8.5)	
Grandmother	1 (1.2)	
Other	1 (1.2)	
Household		
Original family (both biological or adoptive parents presented)	74 (90.2)	
Sole parent family	3 (3.7)	
Separated/Coparenting	2 (2.4)	
Grandparents	1 (1.2)	
Other	2 (2.4)	
Highest Educational Grade Level or Professional Degree Completed		
High School Diploma	1 (1.2)	
Some college/professional training	17 (20.7)	
College degree	35 (42.7)	
Advanced graduate degree	29 (35.4)	
Race/Ethnicity		
Mixed Race	5 (6.1)	
Caucasian/White	42 (51.2)	
African American/Black	2 (2.4)	
Hispanic/Latinx	14 (17.1)	
Native American	1 (1.2)	
Middle Eastern	3 (3.7)	
Asian/Pacific Islander	14 (17.1)	
Other	1 (1.2)	
Years of Preschool and/or TK that Child has Attended		M= 2.29 (SD=1.0)
0	5 (6.1)	
1	8 (9.8)	
2	36 (43.9)	
3	24 (29.3)	
4	9 (11.0)	

The reliability of each subscale for the current study's sample was examined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Both subscales were deemed acceptable with alpha internal consistency estimates of 0.79 for Knowledge and Confidence subscale and 0.79 for the Worry subscale. Additionally, past research has also demonstrated acceptable reliability of both subscales (Giallo et al., 2008). Previous research also demonstrated convergent validity of the PSMTSS with another measure of parental efficacy, the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC; Giallo et al., 2008). The Knowledge and Confidence subscale was significantly positively correlated with children's social adjustment, while the Worry subscale was significantly negatively correlated with children's social and academic adjustment. The Worry subscale was also significantly positively correlated with children's resistance to going to school (Giallo et al., 2008).

Parent Empowerment and Efficacy Measure (PEEM)

This asset-based 20-item tool measures caregivers' sense of being able to engage confidently with the responsibilities of being a parent (Freiberg et al., 2014). The PEEM encourages respondents to reflect on their parenting strengths and any influences within their environment that may help or hinder their capacity to achieve their parenting goals.

There are a total of three subscales: Efficacy to Parent, Efficacy to Connect, and total Empowerment (Freiberg et al., 2014). The Efficacy to Parent Subscale indicates level of confidence and positive orientation to one's parenting role and practice. One example item states, "I feel that I am doing a good job as a parent." The Efficacy to Connect Subscale indicates the degree to which one feels empowered to access support and to participate in activities that promote positive parenting. For example, one item reads, "I know how to get useful information about how my children's needs change as they grow." Finally, the total Empowerment score is a sum of responses to all of the items. This overall total

Empowerment score serves as an indicator of a parent's overall feelings of efficacy (Freiberg et al., 2014) and was used in the current study as an overall measure of parental self-efficacy. The reliability of the total Empowerment subscale in the current study's sample was examined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The reliability was deemed excellent with an alpha internal consistency estimate of 0.91 for the total Empowerment subscale of the PEEM. Previous psychometric analyses indicated that the PEEM has demonstrated acceptable validity and reliability properties (Freiberg et al., 2014). The PEEM was found to exhibit both convergent and concurrent validity with other measures of parental efficacy. Previous research found that the PEEM measures the constructs it was intended to measure (Freiberg et al., 2014).

Procedures

Parents who participated in this study were initially recruited by researchers to participate in a free-of-cost virtual parenting intervention. Upon receiving study approval from the Institutional Review Board, researchers emailed administrators across several public school districts in California (accessed through the California Department of Education database) with information and require-ments for parents interested in participating in the virtual parenting groups. This study specifically focused on parents' experiences during COVID-19 in the summer of 2020 before participating in the parent group intervention. To participate, parents were required to complete an online survey that included informed consent, self-reported demographic information, the PEEM, and the PSMTSS before joining a parent group in July of 2020.

Parents were randomly assigned to one of eight weekly groups that met virtually via Zoom. Researchers facilitated focus groups the last week of July in 2020 to obtain qualitative data regarding parents' experiences before the intervention began. There was an average of 5.4 parents in each focus group. Researchers informed parents at the start of the focus group that they hoped to hear from

all parents and that they were going to ask five broad questions surrounding parental experiences during COVID-19. This study specifically focused on one question that researchers asked participants regarding which resources from the school would be the most helpful to them and their families during the transition to kindergarten. The question asked, "As a parent of an incoming kindergartner, what resources from your school would be most supportive to you and your family during COVID-19 and stay at home orders?"

Data Analyses

Data were analyzed in two ways to address the two primary research questions in this study. Research question (1) examined the impact of parents' overall self-efficacy and knowledge/confidence about the transition to kindergarten on parents' worry about this transition. Specifically, this relation was examined during COVID-19 and stay-at-home orders. To address this question, a two-stage hierarchical linear regression was conducted. Acknowledging the connection between parents' sense of self-efficacy and their overall wellbeing (Albanese et al., 2019), parents' overall self-efficacy (PEEM total Empowerment) was first examined to determine the impact of general parenting self-efficacy on parents' worry specifically about the transition to kindergarten. Next, knowledge and confidence about the transition to kindergarten was added into the model to compare the impact of parents' efficacy specifically surrounding the transition to kindergarten and parents' general efficacy on their worry during the kindergarten transition period. In doing so, researchers aimed to determine which construct of self-efficacy most meaningfully decreased parents' worry about the transition to kindergarten. Preliminary descriptive analyses confirmed that all underlying assumptions for multiple regression were met. An a priori alpha level was set at $p < .05$ to determine the statistical significance of each of the independent variables, overall self-efficacy and knowledge/confidence about the transition

to kindergarten, explaining variance on the dependent variable, parents' worry about this transition.

Research question (2) examined parents' insights regarding what school-based resources would be most supportive to their family during the transition to kindergarten. To address this question, focus groups were recorded on Zoom and parent responses were transcribed by trained researchers. Thematic Analysis was used to code and analyze the data (Nowell, et al., 2017). A total of eight focus groups were coded and analyzed into themes by two researchers using a step-by-step six-phased method for thematic analysis (Nowell, 2017). Themes were inductively developed from the raw data to encapsulate the full range of responses from the parent participants.

Results

Impact of Parental Efficacy and Knowledge/Confidence on Parents' Worry

Parents' overall self-efficacy ($M = 160.56$, $SD = 20.29$) was obtained from parents' total score on the PEEM, with possible scores ranging from 20 (low parental efficacy) to 200 (high parental efficacy). Parents' knowledge and confidence about managing the transition to kindergarten ($M = 20.37$, $SD = 4.95$) was obtained from the Knowledge and Confidence subscale on the PSMTSS, with possible scores ranging from 5 (low knowledge and confidence) to 30 (high knowledge and confidence). Parents' worry about managing the transition to kindergarten ($M = 14.6$, $SD = 4.76$) was obtained from the Worry subscale on the PSMTSS, with possible scores ranging from 4 (low worry) to 24 (high worry).

Before conducting the hierarchical linear regression, relevant assumptions were tested. First, scatterplots of the independent variables and the dependent variable confirmed that each independent variable had a linear relationship with the dependent variable. Second, the assumptions of multicollinearity and singularity

were also met, as none of the independent variables were highly correlated. Further confirming lack of multicollinearity, a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) score of 1.28 across the two predictors and a tolerance score of 0.781 indicate that this assumption was met. The third and fourth assumptions that the values of the residuals are independent (Durbin-Watson = 2.49) and normally distributed were also met. Fifth, the assumption that the variance of residuals is constant was also met. Lastly, Cook's Distance values were all below one, suggesting that there were no significant outliers. Therefore, it was determined that individual cases were not disproportionately influencing the model.

A two stage hierarchical linear regression was conducted with worry about the transition to kindergarten as the dependent variable. Parents' overall self-efficacy (PEEM total Empowerment) was entered at block one of the regression. Then, knowledge and confidence about the transition to kindergarten were entered at block two. Intercorrelations between the multiple regression variables are reported in Table 2. Additionally, Table 3 reports upon the hierarchical linear regression coefficients.

Table 2. *Correlation Matrix*

		PSMTSS Knowledge & Confidence	PSMTS Worry	PEEM Total Empowerment
PSMTSS Knowledge & Confidence	Pearson Correlation	1	-.423**	.456**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
PSMTSS Worry	Pearson Correlation	-.423**	1	-.266*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.017
PEEM Total Empowerment	Pearson Correlation	.456**	-.266*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.017	

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3. *Hierarchical Linear Regression Coefficients*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	24.615	4.143		5.941	0.000	16.366	32.864
PEEM Total Empowerment	-0.063	0.026	-0.266	-2.436	0.017	-0.114	-0.011
2 (Constant)	25.285	3.912		6.464	0.000	17.496	33.074
PEEM Total Empowerment	-0.021	0.027	-0.087	-0.749	0.456	-0.075	0.034
PSMTSS Knowledge & Confidence	-0.363	0.111	-0.382	-3.280	0.002	-0.583	-0.143

Note. Dependent Variable: PSMTSS Worry

The hierarchical linear regression revealed that at block one, parents' overall self-efficacy contributed significantly to the regression model, $F (1, 78) = 5.94$, $p < .05$, and accounted for 7.1% of the variation in parents' worry about the transition to kindergarten. However, introducing parents' knowledge and confidence about the transition to kindergarten variable explained an additional 11.4% of variation in worry, and this change in R^2 was significant, $F (2, 77) = 8.72$, $p < .05$. When parents' knowledge and confidence about the transition to kindergarten were included in block two of the regression model, parents' overall self-efficacy was no longer a significant predictor of worry to the transition to kindergarten. Thus, the most important predictor of worry was parents' knowledge and confidence about the transition to kindergarten which uniquely explained 11.4% of the variation in worry. Together the two variables account for 18.5% of the variance in worry about the transition to kindergarten.

Parents' Experiences and Needs During the Transition to Kindergarten

In response to what school-based resources would be helpful to parents during the transition to kindergarten, COVID-19, and stay-at-home orders, parent responses were organized utilizing Thematic Analysis (Nowell, et al., 2017). Based on the raw transcribed data, researchers coded and inductively developed themes from parent responses. Parent perspectives were clustered into four core themes: preparatory information, instructional practices, classroom relationship building and familiarization, and parent support.

Provide Parents with Preparatory Information

One theme that emerged from parent perspectives involved being provided with preparatory information from the school. Parents' responses were centered around receiving clear information from the school regarding daily schedules and routines as well as information about the necessary supplies and materials. Parent responses and suggestions for preparatory information that would be most helpful from their schools included, "I would like a weekly schedule, something to follow, what is due on certain dates and when Zoom calls will be…Just more of an organized calendar type of situation so I know exactly how to manage my time with my job as well as me teaching her." Another parent stated, "I think that having some sort of organizational, even kind of like a visual board of what you know what's kind of expected, next steps of like a schedule or something." Lastly, a first-time kindergarten parent included, "I don't know what to expect at all for kindergarten, let alone you know virtual distance learning kindergarten. So maybe having at least some kind of idea of what a kindergarten schedule will look like, what kind of work she's gonna need to do, how much involvement I'm gonna need. Even just like an informational website or page, or something like that would be extremely helpful." Evidently, incoming kindergarten parents desired clearly organized preparatory information to facilitate a smooth transition to kindergarten.

Provide Parents with Information about Instructional Practices

Another theme that emerged from parents included a desire for instructional practices from the school to implement at home and opinions about instructional practices that teachers should be utilizing in their classroom. More specifically, parents varied in their opinions regarding optimal instruction during distance learning, such as live virtual instruction, in-person learning pods, and non-technological hands-on activities. For example, one parent stated, "For me it would probably be to have some recorded video lessons." Another parent mentioned, "Resources for me that would be really helpful would be more individualized learning opportunities or small groups." Another parent stated, "I think hardcopy handouts are great because it is easy for the parents to follow, hands-on for the kids." Similarly, another parent agreed that she "would like as many resources as possible that are not technology." However, in commenting on the value of live instruction, another parent stated, "What I think what he needs for next year is that really engaging kindergarten teacher so that he wants to go to Zoom." Although not widely voiced, a small number of parents requested information regarding special education services and specialized learning for students. For example, one parent stated that her daughter "is supposed to have a one-on-one aide daily for her IEP and also her therapy, so no one's reached out over how that would happen...for those who do have special educational needs, what is the plan?" Overall, parents believed it would be beneficial to receive information on instructional practices to support their children during the transition to kindergarten.

Provide Students with Classroom Relationship Building and Familiarization Opportunities

Another core theme that emerged across parent responses included priming students for the transition to kindergarten through providing opportunities for one-on-one or small group relationship

building with teachers and peers. One parent mentioned, "Having a relationship with the teacher I think is very important because I think kids, incoming kindergarteners, don't really know what to expect from school. So, having that comfort of having their teacher and having that relationship I think it's very important." In regard to building relationship with peers, one parent stated that she would "love for her to be able to get to know her classmates and try to make friends, even virtually...some form of social time for the kids to be able to get together and even chat in smaller groups would be something that I think would be extremely beneficial for the kids." Additionally, parents hoped for their children to be able to familiarize themselves with the physical school and classroom environment prior to the first day of school. For example, one parent hoped for her child to "maybe visit the school...walk around the school, show them the classroom...for her to get acquainted with the campus." Overall, parents desired opportunities for their children to become familiar with their school environment prior to the start of the school year.

Provide Support to Parents

A fourth theme around which parent responses were clustered included ways that schools might provide support to parents in the transition to kindergarten. A first-time parent shared, "We've never done this before, we've never been in kindergarten before, we haven't been through the school process so to even start it this way is really unnerving and it's almost like I don't know what I need because I don't know what's normal and what we should be getting...I think supporting these brand-new families into the school system is really important and helpful for those of us who are new and don't have any idea of what we're walking into." Additionally, parents indicated a desire for schools to facilitate connections between parents and teachers and among parents themselves. Lastly, parents requested additional information and support from the school regarding developmental milestones and expectations for kindergarten entry skills prior to the start of the school year.

A parent unfamiliar with the U.S. school system shared, "I didn't go to school here, so I don't really know what it's like, it's my first time. I'm learning also how the school works...I need to know what should be expected of her." In regard to learning about kindergarten expectations, one parent requested "parent nights where parents come on a Zoom and get support and get questions answered on how should I teach this to my student." Generally, parents hoped to receive direct parent support from their school regarding information about kindergarten expectations and facilitation of parent connections within the school community.

Discussion

The results of this study provide insight into parents' perspectives and experiences during the transition to kindergarten, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures. Previous research has demonstrated parents' critical role in supporting their child's school readiness (Magdalena, 2014), which holds long-term implications for their child's lifelong trajectory (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding ways to best support parents serves to ultimately improve child outcomes. Parents in this study reported information about their overall parental self-efficacy, their knowledge and confidence in supporting their child's transition to kindergarten, and their worry about this transition to kindergarten. Previous research has found an association between increased parental stress and depression and decreased child school readiness (Jeon et al., 2014). Conversely, parental self-efficacy has been linked to many positive outcomes for children including school readiness (Bojczyk et al., 2018), school competence, and academic performance (Phillipson & McFarland, 2016).

In this study, researchers hoped to identify possible avenues to positively influence family school readiness by decreasing parents' worry during the transition to kindergarten. Results indicated that while general parental self-efficacy significantly impacted parents' worry about the transition to kindergarten, parents' efficacy (i.e.,

knowledge and confidence) in supporting the transition to kinder-garten had an even greater impact on parents' worry during this transitional period. This may serve as guidance for parent interven-tions and other school-based supports that focus on supporting incoming kindergarten families. Specifically, these findings demon-strate that targeting parents' knowledge and confidence about supporting their child and managing the transition to kindergarten may meaningfully decrease parents' worry and stress during this potentially stressful and novel period. While it is certainly important to support general parenting skills and efficacy, providing parents with more specific information that targets parents' knowledge about kindergarten and bolsters their confidence in supporting their child's transition may be more influential in decreasing parents' worry during this time.

Moreover, parents' perspectives and experiences regarding how schools can optimally support parents in the transition to kindergarten provides additional guidance for specific school-based parent supports. Current findings from parents' perspectives may serve as updated guidance for school-based parent support programming in not only typical school years but also in the COVID-19 recovery period and any potential future school closures. One overall takeaway from parents includes schools providing flexibility and multiple options for parents in supporting their children prior to and during the kindergarten year. More specifically, this study revealed that parents' perspectives on how schools might best support parents during the transition to kindergarten were cen-tered around the themes of preparatory information, instructional practices, classroom relationship building and familiarization, and parent support. Many of the current study's findings remain con-sistent with previous research conducted before the pandemic. For example, research that directly obtained parents' perspec-tives about the kindergarten transition has highlighted parents' desire for kindergarten expectation and preparatory information as well as family-school relationship building to help prepare their

children for kindergarten (Malsch et al., 2011; McIntyre et al., 2007). While aligning with previous literature, this study also highlighted additional novel parent needs and perspectives on how schools can optimally support families in this transition, giving specific consideration to school closures, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic's residual effects.

Parents in this study requested clear, consistent, and advanced communication from the school with ample notice about scheduling, supplies, and materials needed prior to the start of the school year. This was found to be especially important for first-time parents in preparing their child for kindergarten. Previous research has also noted parent requests for preparatory information such as such as class lists, registration, and transition processes (Malsch et al., 2011; McIntyre et al., 2007). In the current study however, parents' essentials included more detailed logistics of what they should expect as the school year unravels, such as when class is scheduled, what independent work is required, and what materials parents need at home for success. Additionally, parents desired multiple options and modalities to support their child's learning, both at home and school. For example, some parents desired supplemental handouts while others preferred recorded videos to watch on their own time. This highlights the importance of directly communicating with parents in each school community to accurately assess and support parents' specific needs.

Congruent with previous research (Malsch et al., 2011; McIntyre et al., 2007), this study also indicated that parents desire knowledge of what they can do at home to prepare their child for kindergarten. Moreover, results of this study also highlight parents' wishes for additional information about specific instructional practices utilized in kindergarten by the teachers. Parent data from this study underscore the important role of parents as teachers in facilitating their child's learning and development not only prior to kindergarten but throughout the school year in conjunction with their child's learning at school. As the COVID-19 pandemic presented unique

needs for families, the results of this study emphasize parents as key stakeholders, more than ever, in their child's educational success.

Further, parents emphasized the importance of priming their children prior to the school year to familiarize them with the school and classroom setting as well as with their teachers and peers. Advanced relationship building and classroom familiarization opportunities would be especially important to offer to children and families with limited preschool opportunities. Parents also requested additional consultation and collaboration with teachers to problem solve as needed, learn about developmental milestones and expectations, and receive support in furthering their child's learning at home. Finally, parents hoped for schools to facilitate connections between parents. As previous research has highlighted parental requests for the facilitation of teacher-parent support and connections (Malsch et al., 2011; McIntyre et al., 2007), the current study revealed the increased desire for parent-to-parent support and connection. Especially in the context of the global pandemic and limited social interaction, this social support could serve as an important protective factor for families.

The findings of this paper have numerous practical implications for how schools can best support parents in the transition to kindergarten. Previous research highlights the importance of preparing parents with the appropriate tools to foster their child's school readiness (Marti et al., 2018); this study elaborates on the specific types of school-based supports that parents need during this transitional period. The current study also provides schools with additional recent guidance directly from parents that delineates the critical roles that schools may play in supporting families' transition to kindergarten. Specifically, results from this study are particularly sensitive to families' needs that developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is imperative that schools consider parents' needs and perspectives from this time to optimally support parents in the aftermath of the pandemic and in the case of any future school closures.

Limitations

While this study provides meaningful insight into how schools may best support incoming kindergarten parents, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The participants in this study were recruited from a limited number of schools in California, excluding the perspectives of families in other states and countries who were also experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, parent perspectives and needs during the transition to kindergarten and COVID-19 represent a select sample of parents and their unique needs given the time (July 2020) and region (California) of the study. Additionally, this sample consisted of primarily mothers who self-enrolled in the study and therefore had the resources and technology to participate. Further, the surveys and focus groups were only offered virtually in English, requiring internet access and English proficiency to participate. Therefore, this study does not capture the potentially different needs of parents who did not have the technology and resources to participate. Additionally, researchers did not collect specific information regarding the presence of additional stressors during the pandemic that might have impacted parents' perspectives. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was a globally shared experience and common stressor within many households, the homogeneity of participants certainly limits the generalizability of this study's findings.

Future Directions & Conclusion

This study aimed to highlight the voices of parents during this novel and potentially stressful transition to kindergarten. Findings illuminate the importance of schools supporting parental school readiness through providing targeted supports specifically for this transitional time. Future directions should include additional research with fathers, families who have limited preschool experience, first-time kindergarten families, and families who cannot readily access technological resources or communicate with the school in English. It may also be fruitful to examine if parental

self-efficacy and needs change when the global pandemic subsides to further understand how to best support parents during the kindergarten transition moving forward. Given the impact of parents' knowledge and confidence on their worry about the kindergarten transition, future research is also needed on intervention efforts that specifically target parents' knowledge and confidence about the transition to kindergarten. Finally, as circumstances differ across families and communities, schools must continually collaborate and communicate with their students' parents to ensure that the supports they are providing meet their families' needs.

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