

RESEARCH REPORT

A Community Effort to Support the Transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten

JULY 2018

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Table of Contents

- Executive Summary..... 1**
 - A Community Approach to Strengthening Transitions 2
 - Research Methods..... 2
 - Key Findings..... 3
 - Was PKTP implemented as designed? 3
 - In what ways did PKTP participation influence 1) relationships among teachers and family members and 2) communication about the importance of transition?..... 4
 - Implications 5
- Introduction..... 7**
 - The Pre-K to Kindergarten Transitions Project (PKTP) 9
 - Studying PKTP 12
 - Research Methods..... 13
 - Data Analysis 14
- Research Findings 16**
 - Were PKTP’s three components implemented as designed? 16
 - Component 1: Cross-Grade, Cross-School Professional Learning Community through Teacher Transition Team Meetings. 16
 - Component 2: Common Classroom Practices across Pre-K and Kindergarten 20
 - Component 3: Family Learning Activities 24
 - Differences in PKTP Implementation across Sites 26
 - In what ways did PKTP participation influence 1) relationships among teachers and families and 2) communication about the importance of the transition? 27
 - Limitations 32
- Conclusion..... 33**
 - Challenges, Facilitators, and Implications for Practice 34
 - What created challenges for PKTP implementation? 34
 - What facilitated the implementation of PKTP?..... 36
 - Implications for Practice 38

Directions for Future Research.....	39
References.....	42
Appendix A. Study Instruments and Participant Recruitment Strategies.....	46
Appendix B. PKTP Implementation Resources Supporting the Common Classroom Practices.....	48
Appendix C. PKTP 2017-18 Updates.....	49

Executive Summary

Early years are the most crucial for children’s development. Children’s experiences when they enter the educational system set an important foundation for ongoing engagement and learning. When children have positive early school experiences, they are more likely to enjoy school and have fewer absences, key indicators associated with school engagement and long-term academic and social well-being. At the same time, one study found that many children in the United States experience difficulties adjusting to kindergarten. These difficulties occur in areas such as following directions, negotiating differences in home and school culture, working independently, and working as part of a group. Systemic approaches to smoothing transitions between pre-K and early elementary grades—limited in today’s educational practices—present a promising model for improving the quality and coherence of children’s learning experiences at a critical moment in their learning trajectories.

In Chicago’s Altgeld-Riverdale neighborhood, the Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten Transitions Project (PKTP) offers a teacher co-designed, community approach. This program promotes an intentional approach to early educational transitions through the implementation of classroom and community transition practices. PKTP brings together teachers and families from across all schools and early childhood centers serving pre-K and kindergarten students in the Altgeld-Riverdale area. This program is staffed by Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI), a public interest law and policy center.

Researchers at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (Chapin Hall) and the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium) studied the first full-year implementation of PKTP (2016–17), following a pilot year in 2015-16. The motivation behind this work was to provide our local school district (Chicago Public Schools) with information about the core components of PKTP and its ability to increase family engagement as the district was considering scaling up this community-wide approach to supporting the pre-K to kindergarten transition. These findings would also be used by BPI as they considered future iterations and changes to PKTP in the future. More broadly, studying this model offered an opportunity to add to a new and growing knowledge base about practice efforts to improve children’s transitions to and through kindergarten.

A Community Approach to Strengthening Transitions

Rather than offering a transitions curriculum, PKTP includes three core components:¹

1. a cross-grade, cross-school professional learning community for teachers,
2. common classroom practices across pre-K and kindergarten, and
3. family learning activities (“Family Fun Hours” and field trips).

These components can be adapted to different community contexts and student needs by local implementers. Together, these core components are intended to: 1) promote smoother transition experiences for families and children, both academically and social-emotionally; 2) support teachers by building a sense of community; and 3) strengthen connections across grades, schools, teachers, and families.

Research Methods

We addressed two overarching questions in this study:

Research question 1: Was PKTP implemented as designed?

Research question 2: In what ways did PKTP participation influence 1) relationships among teachers and family members and 2) communication about the importance of transition?

We used a developmental evaluation approach to provide relevant feedback to the program developers to inform and strengthen future implementation.

To address the study questions, researchers collected the following types of data across 18 classrooms in the six sites serving pre-K and kindergarten students in Altgeld-Riverdale:

- Teacher surveys completed and administered at the beginning and end of the school year ($n = 16$ in fall 2016, $n = 20$ in spring 2017)
- Parent surveys completed and administered at the beginning and end of the school year ($n = 134$ in fall 2016 and $n = 80$ in spring 2017)

¹ BPI project staff originally conceptualized the professional learning community as the engine driving the common classroom practices and family learning activities, rather than as a separate component as analyzed in this report. However, based on the research conducted, the authors believe it to be a critical element of the model and therefore include it as a core component. Further, BPI project staff view the two types of family learning activities as distinct strategies for building teacher/family relationships across schools and centers.

- Teacher interviews ($n = 8$)
- Focus groups with families of pre-K- and kindergarten-aged children (6 focus groups, $n = 33$)
- Observations of PKTP events across the school year ($n = 6$)
- Documentation developed by PKTP project staff (e.g., agendas, minutes, implementation logs)

We conducted descriptive analyses on survey responses and systematically analyzed interview, focus group, and observation data using a qualitative codebook developed for this study. To assess the fidelity of implementation, we examined data specifically related to PKTP's three components. To explore the influences of PKTP participation on relationships among teachers and parents and communication about the importance of transition, we examined participants' reports about changes in their relationships and knowledge about transition. Finally, we ensured validity of our interpretations by triangulating across these multiple data sources and conducting member checks with participants to ensure the accuracy of findings.

Key Findings

Was PKTP implemented as designed?

Consistent school and center participation in a cross-grade, cross-school professional learning community provided a critical space for deepening classroom and community implementation of PKTP. Participating in monthly teacher meetings allowed pre-K and kindergarten teachers to learn more about their community and how it influenced students and families, develop a network of support, and gain knowledge about strategies they could implement in their classrooms to lead to better student outcomes. Many teachers regularly attended the monthly meetings, an important factor supporting the development of a true cross-grade, cross-school community. School and center leadership supported meeting attendance by finding ways to cover teachers' prep time and experimenting with strategies to communicate what happened at meetings to other pre-K and kindergarten teachers.

Teachers reported that students enjoyed and benefited from the three common classroom practices they had selected for PKTP: self-regulation practices, trauma-sensitive practices, and dramatic play. Teachers selected these common classroom practices because they seemed the most important. They believed in the need to better support their students' social-emotional development and valued the opportunity for professional development in this area. But pre-K teachers reported more consistent implementation of the common classroom practices compared to kindergarten teachers. Both pre-K and kindergarten teachers

implemented the self-regulation practices consistently, but dramatic play and trauma-sensitive practices were implemented with less frequency, particularly among kindergarten teachers. For some teachers, PKTP's lack of clear alignment with their grade-level curricula was an implementation challenge. For example, the pre-K curriculum emphasizes play; thus, pre-K teachers implemented dramatic play with greater regularity than kindergarten teachers. In addition, PKTP's specific supports for each practice varied. PKTP provided teachers with specific tools and techniques to implement self-regulation practices, but the approach to supporting trauma-sensitive practices was more conceptual. Teachers' beliefs about the alignment of common classroom practices with the grade-level curricula, as well as the goals and visions of their sites, correlated with teachers' reports about how often they implemented each type of practice. In addition, teachers expressed wanting a more articulate vision for how these practices—which were being shared across classrooms and schools—contributed to the overall goal of PKTP as a transitions program.

Teachers and families reported that family learning activities created opportunities to develop informal relationships. By intentionally creating community events, PKTP's family learning activities differed from existing family engagement and transition practices at participating schools and centers. Many teachers and family members noted that these events created space for informal conversations and opportunities to become more familiar with community context. Timing, communication, and historical community divisions, however, each influenced family participation.

In what ways did PKTP participation influence: 1) relationships among teachers and family members and 2) communication about the importance of transition?

Teachers and parents reported a greater sense of community as a result of their PKTP participation. Pre-K and kindergarten teachers reported feeling more connected to each other across grade levels and schools because of their participation in PKTP. Parents and teachers also reported feeling more connected with each other through the family learning activities, with some describing their informal conversations during these events as contributing to a change in how teachers and parents communicated about children's academic progress and behavior. These opportunities supported the strengthening of relationships between children and home, school, peer, and community—all of which contribute to students' transition experiences.

PKTP influenced community perceptions of the importance of the kindergarten transition. According to teachers' and families' reports, PKTP helped contribute to a larger sense of community around children's needs in pre-K and kindergarten. However, at the close of the first full year of implementation, PKTP's communication about the importance of transitions was less clear to teacher and parent participants. Parents who participated in PKTP activities did not necessarily understand that there was a focus on the importance of transition. While pre-K teachers reported that PKTP contributed to their understanding of transitions, teachers from both grades indicated that a more explicit integration of transition into PKTP activities would be helpful for clarifying goals and intended outcomes.

Implications

- **Community building provided a foundation for the process of creating alignment between pre-K and kindergarten.** Prior to implementation, project staff from BPI engaged pre-K and kindergarten teachers and administrators across the community in a series of knowledge exchanges and planning meetings. These efforts provided an important foundation for implementation across grades and schools. Teachers reported that the PKTP's community-wide focus was unique and central to their engagement and implementation work. They indicated that prior to participation in PKTP, they had limited to no opportunity to engage with educators outside of their sites and little familiarity with the teaching methods and philosophies used at other grade levels outside of the program. The significant growth in teachers' level of comfort discussing their challenges supporting students and offering implementation advice to each other is one example of PKTP's successes in fostering the collaborative relationships that are fundamental to creating alignment between pre-K and kindergarten. Despite these connections across the community, in practice, philosophical and structural differences across participating education settings (school-based vs. center-based pre-K programs, neighborhood vs. charter elementary schools) and differences between pre-K and kindergarten curricula and expectations posed some barriers to consistent implementation in the classroom. These are important contextual nuances to attend to when implementing a community-wide approach.
- **Focusing on key components rather than a structured curriculum, and co-developing the program with—rather than for—teachers, allowed for flexibility in what practitioners could focus on.** Teachers characterized the design decision to determine and focus on "key components" of the program, but not a specific curriculum, as both a facilitator and a barrier. For this program, not having a transitions curriculum created important flexibility to

respond to teacher and student needs in local community context and across diverse educational settings. At the same time, variation in perceptions of PKTP's alignment with the curricula, goals, and visions of schools and centers created implementation barriers for some teachers. Teachers also reported that as co-designers of the PKTP common classroom practices, these practices aligned with student needs. They also developed the content for family learning activities and established priorities for their professional learning community. While there were important grade-level and site differences in implementation, participants reported that the components were mutually reinforcing over time and that the three core components in combination facilitated both classroom and community transitions work. It will be important to ensure that this flexible approach also includes the communication of a consistent vision for PKTP to support engagement and participation in the future.

- **Having an external facilitator proved key for ongoing collaboration and successful implementation of PKTP.** The time necessary to plan professional learning community meetings, field trips, and family learning activities was substantial. Having BPI as an external facilitator and coordinator provided leadership around these responsibilities (and teacher ownership of those responsibilities would have been hard to sustain). In addition, an external facilitator is uniquely positioned to reflect on how to design future meetings to better meet the needs of all teachers and families across the community. Those implementing programs that bring together staff from multiple schools should consider the support an external facilitator can provide in communicating a consistent vision of the work, particularly within the context of teacher and administrator turnover from one year to the next.

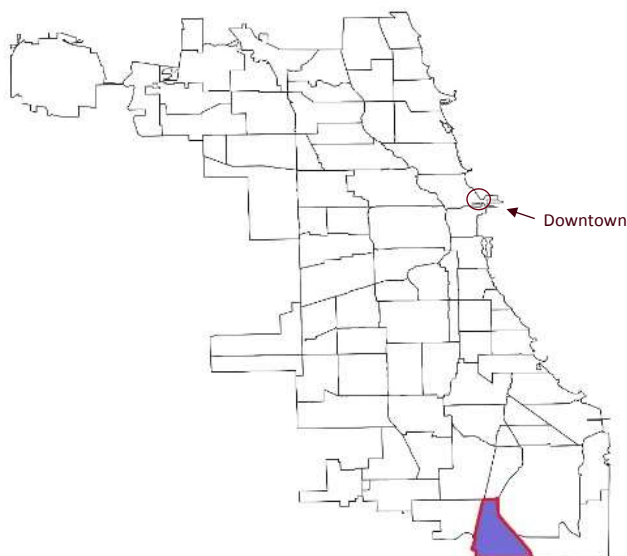
To improve the quality and coherence of children's learning experiences in the early school years, existing literature points to the critical importance of smoothing linkages between pre-K and those early elementary grades. PKTP represents an attempt within one community to start improving the transition experience of students and their families. While the focus of this study was a developmental evaluation for the PKTP program, key findings can inform a broader group of stakeholders focused on strengthening the transition from pre-K to kindergarten in Chicago and across the country.

Introduction

The early years are one of the most crucial times for children's development. Entering early education sets an important stage for later engagement and learning. When children have positive early school experiences, they are more likely to enjoy school and have fewer absences, key indicators associated with school engagement and on-time grade promotion (see, for example, Ladd, Buhs, & Seid, 2000). In one study, about half of the kindergarten teachers sampled across the country reported that at least half of their students experienced some type of difficulty adjusting to kindergarten, including difficulties following directions, negotiating differences in home and school culture, working independently, and working as part of a group (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Children living in poverty and children of color are significantly more likely to experience challenges with the transition into kindergarten (Abry, Latham, Bassok, & LoCasale Crouch, 2015; Christenson, 1999; Ready, 2010; Robinson & Diamond, 2014; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Their teachers are also less likely to work in schools and districts that promote the implementation of practices believed to help with the transition from pre-kindergarten (pre-K) to kindergarten (Cook & Coley, 2017). Systemic approaches to smoothing transitions between pre-K and early elementary grades are currently limited in today's educational practice, but they present a promising model for improving the quality and coherence of children's learning experiences at a critical moment in their learning trajectories (Kauerz & Coffman, 2013; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

In one highly stressed neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, a program was developed in response to a community-wide needs assessment. The resulting Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten Transitions Project (PKTP) takes a teacher co-designed, community approach. This program promotes an intentional approach to early educational transitions through the implementation of classroom and community transition practices. PKTP brings together teachers and families from across all schools and early childhood centers serving pre-K and kindergarten students in Altgeld-Riverdale. This program is staffed by Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI), a public interest law and policy center. PKTP is one part of BPI's broader partnership with stakeholders in Altgeld-Riverdale to bring an organized focus to early learning in the community.

Figure 1. Altgeld-Riverdale in the City of Chicago



Altgeld-Riverdale is a tight-knit, predominantly African American community and home to the largest traditional public housing development in Chicago (see Figure 1). This community has four elementary schools and two early childhood centers serving pre-K and kindergarten students, almost all of which come from within the community. The centers serve low-income families through a combination of Head Start and other funding. It is common for children to attend the same schools and centers that their parents and grandparents attended as children. There are also historical community divisions: between those who live in the community's public housing development and those who do not and between families who have lived in the community for decades and families who are new. These divisions can be sources of tension, with some families feeling unwelcome in particular areas of Altgeld-Riverdale. Together, these characteristics make it an ideal locale to explore the promises of a community approach to supporting children and families during their earliest transition into the school system. The tight locale of the community lays a foundation and promise for PKTP's approach, but Altgeld-Riverdale also has historical community divisions, leaving open the possibility of creating more cohesion than currently exists.

Researchers at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (Chapin Hall) and the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium) studied the first full-year implementation of PKTP in 2016–17. This report provides an overview of PKTP's approach as a transitions program; describes implementation fidelity, successes, and challenges; and characterizes teacher and family reports about their experiences with this effort to create coherence across the schools and centers in Altgeld-Riverdale.

Studying this model offered an opportunity to add to a new and growing knowledge base about implementation efforts to improve kindergarten transition experiences.

The Pre-K to Kindergarten Transitions Project (PKTP)

PKTP has three goals: (1) to promote smoother transition experiences for families and children, both academically and social-emotionally; (2) to support teachers by building a sense of community; and (3) to strengthen connections across grades, schools, teachers, and families—both interpersonally and in terms of the curriculum and supports children experience. In 2012, a community needs assessment and transitions work group convened by the Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Coalition identified strengthening pre-K to kindergarten transitions as a priority. The Early Learning Coalition includes community residents and representatives from childcare centers, elementary schools, social service providers, city agencies (e.g., Chicago Public Library, Chicago Housing Authority, Chicago Park District), and faith-based communities.

PKTP's design was refined through two years of planning with Altgeld-Riverdale teachers and administrators. As designed, PKTP articulates three core components: a cross-grade, cross-school professional learning community, common classroom practices across pre-K and kindergarten, and family learning activities (see Figure 2). Participating teachers

Community Background

Altgeld-Riverdale became a residential area in 1945, when the National Housing Agency, the Federal Public Housing Authority, and the Chicago Housing Authority opened the Altgeld Gardens Housing Project (The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago, 2005). In the following decades, other housing was added, including the Phillip Murray Homes and Eden Greens, one of the nation's first majority black-owned and operated townhouse and apartment developments. Today, the Chicago Housing Authority operates 1,971 row homes in Altgeld-Riverdale (Chicago Housing Authority, n. d.).

Roughly 7,000 people live in Altgeld-Riverdale, almost half of whom are under the age of 18 (estimated at 49%; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2015). More than 95% of these residents are African American. Altgeld-Riverdale's population decreased by 34% between 2000 and 2010, compared to a 7% decrease for the city of Chicago overall (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2015).

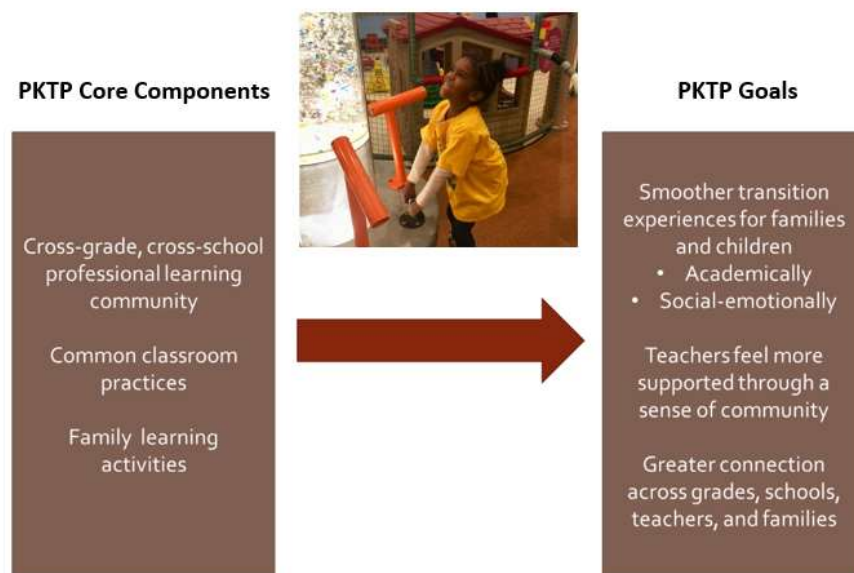
Today, Altgeld-Riverdale remains geographically and economically isolated from the rest of Chicago. One bus route serves the community. This limited access to public transportation affects residents' employment opportunities. Almost two-thirds of Altgeld-Riverdale families (61%) live below the poverty line and the unemployment rate is 39% (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2016). Based on unemployment, education, per capita income level, poverty, crowded housing, and dependency metrics, residents in this community face the greatest economic hardship of all of Chicago's 77 community areas. Safety issues are a longstanding community concern. Altgeld-Riverdale was ranked 12th highest of all Chicago communities in terms of its homicide rate in 2016 (UChicago Crime Lab, 2017).

The Chicago Housing Authority was renovating Altgeld Gardens during the study period, including the rehabilitation of 218 rowhomes in 2015–16.

^A Based on The Chicago Community Area Economic Hardship Index which draws from the 2010-14 American Community Survey five-year estimates. See <https://greatcities.uic.edu/2016/09/19/economic-hardship-index-shows-stark-inequality-across-chicago/>

defined the content and implementation of each component with project staff² to address student needs and community concerns. Teachers hoped this co-design approach would support PKTP’s sustained implementation across Altgeld-Riverdale’s multiple education settings. BPI staffed PKTP to support coordination across multiple sites and types of programs, as well as to communicate a consistent vision of the work in the context of teacher and administrator turnover.

Figure 2. PKTP Theory of Action



The following example demonstrates how PKTP’s theory of action works: Teachers introduced “the turtle technique,” a series of practices designed to teach children strategies for managing anger, disappointment, and frustration as part of PKTP’s common classroom practices.³ Each classroom had a Tucker the Turtle puppet and children learned how to “think like Tucker” when they got mad or frustrated: stop, tuck inside their shell and take three deep breaths to calm down, and then think of a solution or a way to make things better. All children were exposed to Tucker and these practices. As a result, when children in pre-K classrooms in the Altgeld-Riverdale community transitioned into kindergarten within that same community, they would see Tucker and know exactly what to do. The sense of familiarity for children and having a practice that was common to everyone—all children and all teachers—allows for

² In the pilot year, BPI and CPS staffed PKTP.

³ See http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/teaching_tools/ttyc_toc.htm#turtle Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI) for Young Children.

continuity in managing self-regulation during a time that children might be nervous and uncomfortable about being in a new classroom.

Table 1 summarizes PKTP’s three core components⁴ and the implementation fidelity indicators established by project staff or articulated by researchers in partnership with project staff (or both).

Table 1. Description of PKTP's Core Components and Implementation Fidelity Indicators

PKTP Core Component	Description	Implementation Fidelity Indicators
Cross-grade, cross-school professional learning community	Pre-K and kindergarten teachers from across all schools and centers meet monthly at a “Teacher Transition Team” meeting facilitated by BPI project staff	Consistent meeting attendance across schools and centers Meeting content and action steps communicated to all teachers
Common classroom practices across pre-K and kindergarten	Pre-K and kindergarten teachers implement a set of common classroom practices to support the social-emotional development and learning of their students: practices to promote self-regulation, trauma-sensitive practices, and practices to promote dramatic play	Daily implementation of common classroom practices across pre-K and kindergarten*
Family learning activities	Pre-K and kindergarten teachers, children, and their families participate in “Family Fun Hours” hosted at elementary schools and field trips	Consistent teacher participation across schools and centers Consistent family participation over time

**Project staff initially established daily implementation as the expectation for all common classroom practice, but kindergarten teachers advocated for implementing practices to support dramatic play less frequently due to less alignment with their curricular and instructional expectations.*

Designers of PKTP intended it as a new type of transitions model that builds across the community to create a deeper connection across grades (pre-K and kindergarten), among schools, and between teachers and families. Many transition models focus largely on addressing the pre-K and kindergarten grade-level differences that often exist. In addition, it is common for transition- or alignment-focused

⁴ BPI project staff originally conceptualized the professional learning community as the engine driving the common classroom practices and family learning activities, rather than as a separate component as analyzed in this report. Further, BPI project staff view the two types of family learning activities as distinct strategies for building teacher-family relationships across schools and centers.

efforts to bring together a small number of individual programs (e.g., one preschool program with one charter network). PKTP attempts to do more than many existing programs.⁵ Specifically, in Altgeld-Riverdale, this model brought together pre-K and kindergarten programs under the auspices of two larger agencies in Chicago: Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the City of Chicago Department of Family & Support Services (DFSS). School-based pre-K programs at CPS and community-based pre-K programs at DFSS use different approaches to support rigorous and developmentally appropriate instruction and engaging families as part of the learning process. In Altgeld-Riverdale, the three neighborhood elementary schools and the one charter elementary school had differences in their visions for early elementary instruction. Building collaborative working relationships among staff at schools and centers also posed challenges because sites in Altgeld-Riverdale are often in competition with each other for student enrollment.⁶

Because PKTP is a community effort, implementation of this program is situated within multilevel and layered systems—those that include interpersonal relations—as well as the organizational cultures and systems that play a role in experiences (e.g., systems within each school, differences between schools and centers, differences between schools/centers and home culture), and more largely by the community in which all of these schools/centers, staff, students, and families are embedded. Consequently, study findings draw on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to conceptualize the influences of PKTP implementation on participants' sense of community and to inform understanding of the role of community building in PKTP and, potentially, in other transitions programs adopting a community approach.

Studying PKTP

Chapin Hall and UChicago Consortium studied this particular program for several reasons. First, CPS, our local school district, had an interest in understanding the rollout of this community program supporting the transition into kindergarten. CPS expressed interest in possibly scaling the program into other communities if successful. Thus, they were looking to better understand: (1) what the individual components of PKTP were and which pieces would be critical to keep if it were implemented in other

⁵ Similar to PKTP, the “Ready Freddy” (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012) and the Early Childhood and Community School Linkages Project (Geiser, Horwitz, & Gerstein, 2013) transitions models seek to strengthen transitions across multiple pre-K and kindergarten programs. These models, however, do not include PKTP’s community approach.

⁶ BPI’s initial intent was to support PKTP implementation with formal project staff for the pilot year, then turn leadership over to teachers.

communities and (2) whether PKTP increased family engagement, an area the district was interested in improving, across all schools and programs. This small research study would help refine the program's theory of action by identifying the necessary characteristics of the three components and begin to provide the district with feedback for consideration in other communities.

Another reason to study PKTP's implementation was to add to a new and growing knowledge base about practices implemented, successes achieved, and challenges faced regarding the pre-K to kindergarten transition. Much of the existing literature on alignment and transition practices focuses on philosophies around supporting continuity of practices. Far less focuses on what people are actually *doing* to create more coherence across the early grades (from pre-K through early elementary school). These findings would inform future iterations and changes to PKTP in the future and the broader group of stakeholders focused on strengthening the transition from pre-K to kindergarten in Chicago and across the country.

This study employed a mixed-methods developmental evaluation approach (see Patton, 2011).

Developmental evaluations are situated within complex scenarios and are designed with the goal of providing information to program implementers in real time.

To address these objectives, the study asked:

1. Were PKTP's three components implemented as designed?
2. In what ways did PKTP participation influence 1) relationships among teachers and families and 2) communication about the importance of transition?

Research Methods

Researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data throughout the first year of PKTP's implementation (the 2016–17 school year), as summarized in Table 2. Across the six sites serving pre-K and kindergarten students, we administered teacher surveys and parent surveys at the beginning and end of the school year; conducted teacher interviews and focus groups with families of pre-K- and kindergarten-aged children; and observed six PKTP events across the 2016–17 school year. Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded⁷ and transcribed, while observation notes were either typed in real time or taken by hand and then typed later. We also reviewed documents, including agendas, attendance logs, minutes, and project staff notes for PKTP core components. The analysis also examined teacher-completed fidelity logs

⁷ Participants in one focus group did not consent to audio recording, so researchers took notes instead.

on common practices. Appendix A includes additional detail about study instruments and methods used to recruit teacher and parent participants.

Table 2. Data Collection

Type of Data	Fall 2016 (n)	Spring 2017 (n)
Quantitative Data		
<i>Surveys</i>		
Family	134	80
Pre-K and kindergarten teachers	16	20
Qualitative Data		
<i>Interviews</i>		
Pre-K and kindergarten teachers		8
<i>Focus groups</i>		
Families of pre-K students (4 focus groups)		23
Families of kindergarten students (2 focus groups)		10
<i>Observations of PKTP core components</i>		
Cross-grade, cross-school professional learning community	2	3
Family learning activities		1

Note: Total Ns in Altgeld-Riverdale community: ~21 pre-K/kindergarten teachers and ~350 families with pre-K or kindergarten students. Interviews and focus group occurred during spring 2017 to capture participants' reflections on the first full year of PKTP implementation. Observation data were timed to cover two arcs of teacher planning, implementation, and reflection related to the common classroom practices and family learning activities components.

Data Analysis

Surveys. Statistical software (SAS) was used to compile descriptive statistics for responses overall.

Additionally, we investigated differences and similarities by comparing responses between the fall 2016 and spring 2017 surveys and disaggregating responses by grade-level (i.e., pre-K vs. kindergarten responses), participant type (i.e., teacher vs. parent responses), and site.

Interviews, focus groups, observations, document review. The implementation fidelity indicators were established by program staff or defined by researchers in partnership with program staff. These regular discussions informed the creation of an initial codebook, or set of theory- and data-driven concepts, to guide qualitative analysis using NVivo computer-based coding software. Researchers applied axial coding to refine existing codes and open coding to identify new codes using a subset of transcripts (two interviews and one focus group; Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2014). Once reliability was established, two researchers systematically analyzed observation, interview, and focus group data. Researchers created codes for: PKTP's three components and supported practices, participant experiences, implementation resources (including project staff), factors influencing children's transitions, participant relationships (e.g.,

teacher–teacher, teacher–parent, and parent–parent), PKTP communication about transition, transition beliefs and practices, and school/center culture and climate. To generate emergent findings and guide ongoing analysis, researchers created low-inference, site-specific summaries (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and developed analytic memos (Corbin et al., 2014) to respond to research questions and surface where additional analyses were needed.

Additionally, we re-analyzed quantitative and qualitative study data using the multiple, interrelated layers of interpersonal, organizational, and community systems outlined in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In particular, we paid close attention to how the community factors and relations may have played a role in PKTP implementation and uptake. Table 3 summarizes our analysis approach by research question.

Table 3. Analysis Approach to Address Research Questions

	Teacher surveys	Family surveys	Teacher interviews	Family focus groups	PKTP activity observation	Document review
Research Question 1: Was PKTP implemented as designed?						
Implementation fidelity	X	X	X	X	X	X
Participant experiences	X	X	X	X		
Implementation resources	X		X		X	X
Research Question 2: In what ways did PKTP participation influence 1) relationships among teachers and parents and 2) communication about the importance of transition?						
Consistency/change in relationships	X	X	X	X	X	
PKTP communication about transition			X	X	X	X
Transition beliefs and practices	X	X	X	X		

To ensure the validity of emergent findings, we triangulated across these multiple data sources where possible and examined possible alternative interpretations. We also conducted member checks with PKTP project staff, teachers, and administrators at Altgeld-Riverdale schools/centers following initial analysis to ensure the accuracy of findings.

Research Findings

Were PKTP's three components implemented as designed?

Project staff and teachers implemented all three core PKTP components during the school year. Regular teacher meetings provided a space for teachers to reflect on their implementation of common classroom practices and family learning activities and identify adjustments to align implementation with the vision for PKTP. At the same time, there were grade-level and site differences in teachers' perceptions and implementation reports, and some differences among families with respect to how they viewed the value of PKTP family learning activities and the community approach.

Component 1: Cross-Grade, Cross-School Professional Learning Community through Teacher Transition Team Meetings

The monthly teacher meetings brought pre-K and kindergarten teachers together from all schools and centers in Altgeld-Riverdale. These meetings were designed to begin breaking down significant differences between grades and among the community's multiple education settings in terms of teaching methods and philosophies. BPI project staff convened teachers monthly during lunch hour to facilitate ongoing professional development related to PKTP's goals. As facilitators, they established agendas for the 1.5-hour meetings and actively solicited ideas and feedback from participants from across all schools and centers. The meetings initially rotated between the participating sites but were most consistently held at a site that did not have the capacity to provide substitute coverage for teachers.

The Teacher Transition Team meetings were well attended. Teachers or leaders from all schools and centers participated in six of the eight total meetings. Meeting agenda items included updates on the three common classroom practices, ongoing opportunities to reflect on implementation in the classroom and community, debriefing and planning for family learning activities, and topics prioritized by teachers as important for supporting their transitions work with children and their families. For example, expert speakers delivered professional development at three meetings on three topics requested by teachers: addressing strategies for trauma-informed practices, the new pre-K enrollment process, and family engagement in the context of the special education assessment process. At other sessions, project staff facilitated discussion about implementing PKTP's three components in the context of the Altgeld-Riverdale community (e.g., new CHA housing came online during the school year, leading to significant

mid-year changes in student enrollment) and systemic issues related to transitions (e.g., site- and grade-specific student assessment practices and differing site practices related to supporting pre-K families through the kindergarten enrollment process).

Consistent with ecological system theory's conceptualization of an individual person's experience as being situated within multiple layers of a system, findings suggest that this cross-grade, cross-school community led to change in how teachers understood themselves, their role, and their students and families. As described below, teachers gained deeper understandings of the community in which they all worked and developed interpersonal relationships.

Participating in Teacher Transition Team meetings deepened teachers' understanding of the needs of students and families within the community context. Teachers reported that they valued the monthly facilitated Teacher Transition Team meetings and professional learning community that developed over the school year. As described by teachers, participating in the Teacher Transition Team meetings yielded important and actionable information about best practices and strategies for addressing the needs of students within the Altgeld-Riverdale community. One teacher explained that she valued this new common (rather than site-based) approach because she better understood her students' attendance and behavior in class in the context of community trends such as public housing changes and safety concerns. Similarly, another teacher reported that because she was the only teacher at her grade-level at her site, the meetings gave her a unique "opportunity to interact with pre-K and kindergarten teachers in the community. . . [and] find out what kind of issues they're having over there [at other sites], how they're doing things."

Teachers also valued the specific content related to student and community needs that was covered at these meetings. For example, as a result of trauma-focused professional development and discussion during Teacher Transition Team meetings, teachers saw challenges that they were experiencing with individual students, such as inability to focus or outbursts in class, as being related to trauma exposure. For one teacher, participating in this professional development helped her identify for the first time that behaviors she and others were "seeing a lot with many of our students" was likely associated with trauma.

Teacher Transitions Team meetings supported the development of a cross-grade community.

Analyses of observations and project documentation suggest that how teachers engaged in this professional learning community deepened in substantive ways during 2016–17. At the beginning of the school year, meetings were conducted similar to scripted share-outs in response to facilitator prompts.

However, as the year progressed, discussion during the meetings became increasingly robust and teacher-led, with teachers asking each other for input about how to address implementation and teaching issues they were experiencing. Teachers also reflected on whether the practices were contributing to the intended outcomes in their classrooms, including commenting on their relationships with particular students and their parents. They also discussed their responses to specific episodes of gun violence and strategies to support students across the community. In teacher surveys, the majority of teachers valued the sharing of expertise and resources received through these meetings at the end of the school year (60% in spring 2017 as compared with 50% in fall 2016). However, pre-K teachers were more likely to “completely agree” that expertise and resources received were valuable over time (64% in spring 2017 and 50% in fall 2016) compared to their kindergarten peers (50% in both spring 2017 and fall 2016). This suggests continued opportunities to assess and adjust the content of these meetings to support the professional development needs of both pre-K and kindergarten teachers.

Schools and centers found ways to participate in Teacher Transition Team meetings despite structural challenges. All six sites were consistently represented at the Teacher Transition Team meetings (as described above). Attending these meetings was easier for some sites than others, given structural differences among Altgeld-Riverdale’s multiple education settings. Teachers at three of the four elementary schools were able to attend during prep time or had leadership who secured sub coverage for their classrooms. At one of these schools, two teachers consistently attended meetings throughout the school year; at the other two schools, the pre-K and kindergarten teachers tended to rotate meeting attendance. However, coverage in the classroom was more difficult at other sites. To address this challenge, the two community-based centers and one of the elementary schools elected to send an administrator or head teacher, who consistently participated and disseminated information to their staff, and tried to schedule at least one other teacher to attend. One of these sites then determined that the meetings represented an important professional growth opportunity for teachers and began to intentionally rotate which staff member attended with the administrator or head teacher. In addition, this site began to use internal staff meetings as a mechanism for disseminating information from the Teacher Transition Team meetings and discussing how to implement particular ideas. Teachers who did not attend the Teacher Transition Team meetings did participate in some of PKTP’s family learning activities, however.

Overall, these adjustments suggest that staff across schools found the teacher team meetings valuable enough to make them work with their schedules and structures. PKTP’s flexibility allowed each school and

center to identify its own participation strategy, with teachers that consistently participated in the meetings better able to describe this component of PKTP in detail.

Teachers described the project staff positions supported by BPI as key to building the professional learning culture, but also wanted dedicated instructional coaching.

Teachers characterized the BPI project staff as making critical contributions to building the professional learning culture—what one teacher described as “definitely a peer learning community.” They valued the ability of BPI project staff to provide feedback and identify potential resources and partners to address needs identified by teachers, along with project staff’s genuine interest in Altgeld-Riverdale and vision for the program. One teacher specifically noted that in addition to sharing information with other teachers in the neighborhood, she valued the opportunity to network with PKTP staff and the supports that they brought through PKTP. In addition, these staff provided important coordination and logistical support to facilitate implementation of family learning activities, including bus transportation to events.

Teachers across sites also reported that they themselves did not have a clear sense of PKTP’s instructional goals, which created an ongoing implementation challenge. In interviews, teachers who attended the monthly teacher team meetings consistently, as well as those who did not, asked for greater clarity around expectations for implementation and coaching support to help fine-tune their transitions work with students. In the spring survey, about half of teachers (47%) completely agreed that BPI project staff possessed deep knowledge about transitions challenges specifically.⁸

Summary of Component 1: Cross-grade, cross-school professional learning community. Teachers and staff reported that the monthly teacher team meetings were valuable. They brought together teachers from across grades and schools who had never had a structure for working together before. Their joint time together allowed them to learn more about their community and how it influenced their students and families, develop a network to support each other, and gain knowledge about strategies they could implement in their classrooms to lead to better student outcomes. The structure of the meetings was flexible enough to allow each school to determine who would attend each month. Having an external organization run the meetings was crucial for teachers, as they believed they would not have time to devote to that task. However, there continues to be room for improvement, particularly around the specific trainings teachers receive. In particular, teachers are seeking more direct instructional support.

⁸ A Chicago Public Schools staff member had also provided this type of expertise during PKTP’s pilot year.

Component 2: Common Classroom Practices across Pre-K and Kindergarten

Teachers in Altgeld-Riverdale chose to focus on practices that supported social-emotional development: self-regulation, trauma-sensitive practices, and dramatic play. Teachers' interest in these practices matched well with what parents reported on our survey as the most important skills for children to have upon kindergarten entry. More than 40% of both pre-K and kindergarten parents rated the following skills as the three most important skills they thought children needed when entering kindergarten (from a list of 11): (1) follow the teacher's directions; (2) care for him or herself (for example, is able to feed self, button or zipper own clothes); and (3) take turns and share with other children.⁹

PKTP staff outlined how each classroom (pre-K and kindergarten) would implement self-regulation and trauma-sensitive practices. First, they would help children identify their feelings three times per day. In addition, they would use the Tucker the Turtle calming technique (discussed on page 10) and zones of regulation framework one time per day. PKTP staff also articulated objectives for how each classroom would implement practices to promote dramatic play: full implementation of dramatic play centers, changing the center's focus at least bimonthly, and selecting a focus that coincided with the themes of the curriculum unit. To conform to differences in curricular and instructional expectations at different grade levels, pre-K teachers were asked to implement these practices for at least 50 minutes per day while kindergarten teachers were asked to implement them for at least 30 minutes per day. BPI project staff also framed PKTP's goals for the common classroom practices in terms of supporting teachers to identify strategies that worked within their classrooms and school contexts, de-emphasizing the fidelity indicators specific to the common classroom practices indicators over time (see Table 1). Appendix B describes the specific implementation resources that PKTP provided to support implementation of each common classroom practice.

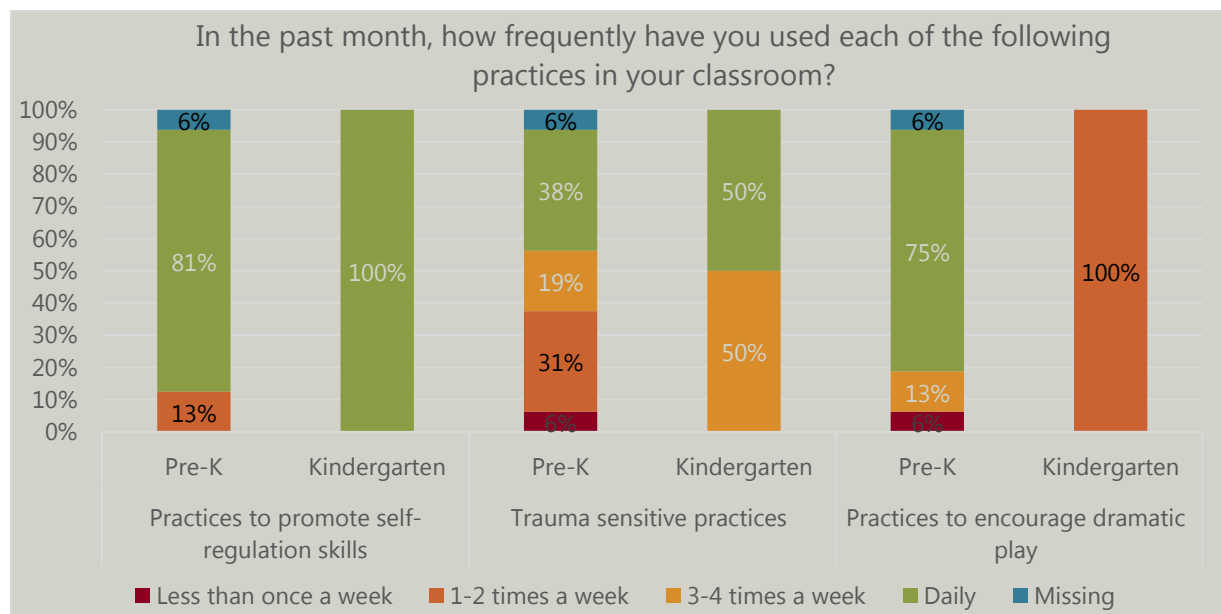
Teachers indicated that their students enjoyed and benefited from the common classroom practices. Teachers said their students enjoyed and benefitted from their implementation of the common classroom practices supported by PKTP. During one Teacher Transition Team meeting, one teacher said of one of the common classroom practices she was implementing to support self-regulation, "They love it."

⁹ These three options were the highest rated for kindergarten parents; for pre-K parents, these three fell within the top four chosen, with the other being able to write your name. The other eight options on the survey were: (1) finish tasks he or she starts; (2) use hands well with small objects (for example, can hold a pencil or use a scissor); (3) know most of the letters of the alphabet; (4) count to 20; (5) sort things by size or color; (6) write first name, even if some letters are backwards; (7) be sensitive to other children's feelings; and (8) read or pretend to read storybooks

Her students would regularly point to feelings on the chart to express how they were doing when interacting both with her and their peers. In another school, the counselor integrated the idea of Tucker the Turtle into her work with students. Another teacher reported in an interview that dramatic play was an effective strategy for her students because “you can lose yourself, you know, you can become somebody else. . . . It relaxes them. It calms them.”

Teachers reported that they valued the common classroom practices but implemented them unevenly, in part because of how they aligned with classroom, grade, and school/site goals. Though teachers saw value in each of the three common classroom practices, they did not implement the practices as frequently as originally envisioned (at least daily). Responding to the spring 2017 survey, almost all teachers reported implementing self-regulation practices in their classrooms daily (81% for pre-K teachers and 100% for kindergarten teachers), as shown in Figure 3. For the two other practices, fewer teachers reported daily implementation. Roughly one-third (38%) of pre-K teachers and half (50%) of kindergarten teachers reported daily implementation of trauma-sensitive practices in their classrooms. Implementation of practices to encourage dramatic play differed significantly by grade level: three-quarters (75%) of pre-K teachers implemented practices to encourage dramatic play daily in their classrooms, but all kindergarten teachers implemented dramatic play less than once per week. Log data about implementation collected by project staff also suggest that these implementation frequencies were fairly consistent from the middle to the end of the school year.

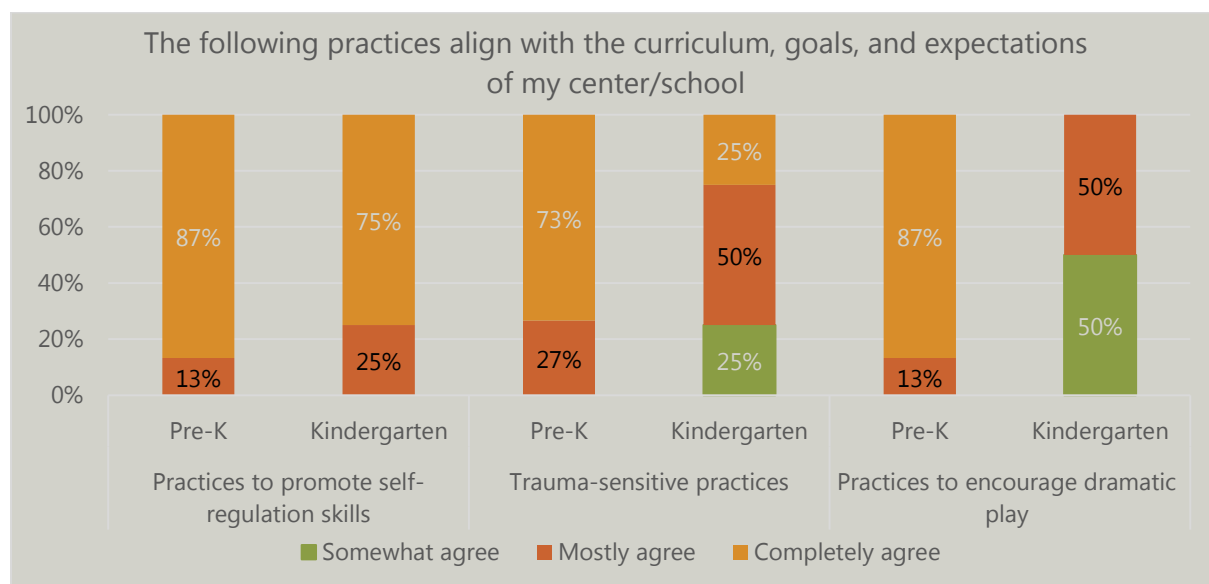
Figure 3. Teacher-Reported Frequency of Using Common Classroom Practices Varied by Grade Level



Note: 16 pre-kindergarten and 4 kindergarten teachers responded.

Teachers reported finding it easy to integrate some—but not all—practices into their existing curriculum and structures. For example, one teacher described how she was able to integrate one aspect of the trauma-sensitive practices, the feelings chart, into two of her existing instructional routines. “Students share their feelings during morning meeting. If they do a character analysis during reading, then students have to say what the character is feeling,” she explained. Teachers were more likely to frequently implement practices that they perceived as being strongly aligned with school/center goals. One year into full implementation, both pre-K and kindergarten teachers strongly believed that practices promoting self-regulation skills were aligned with curriculum, goals, and expectations within their school/center (see Figure 4). This finding aligns with what one would expect from the ecological systems theory; here, and in the findings below, we see evidence that the organizational structures—either at the school, grade, or classroom level—affect teachers’ ability to implement particular practices into their existing instructional routines.

Figure 4. Alignment of Practices to Promote Self-Regulation Skills with School/Center Curricula, Goals, and Expectations



Note: 15 pre-kindergarten and 4 kindergarten teachers responded.

However, kindergarten teachers were less likely to report that trauma-sensitive practices and practices to encourage dramatic play aligned with their school’s curriculum and goals. Teachers also noted that their school administrators tended to view play-based approaches as not being well aligned with academic learning goals. As one kindergarten teacher explained in an interview, she had started to integrate dramatic play but did not feel she could implement it daily because of her focus on building students’ academic skills.

At the same time, teachers described needing to continually support students through the use of these practices in order to achieve the intended outcomes for children. As one teacher explained, she found the practices effective in the moment, but continued to struggle with behavioral challenges. “[My students] like Tucker and it works. And then in 5–10 minutes, it starts all over again.” Pre-K and kindergarten teachers further expressed that they needed more support to implement the trauma-sensitive practices. While they had developed a better understanding of the impact of trauma on behavior, they did not necessarily feel they had the skills to effectively and systematically implement trauma-sensitive practices. Consistent with teachers’ comments, the trauma-sensitive professional development provided through PKTP was primarily conceptual, in contrast with the concrete strategies provided to support implementation of self-regulation and dramatic play practices.

Summary of Component 2: Common classroom practices. Teachers said they could see how the common classroom practices supported their students' learning and development. Across schools and grades, there was a high rate of implementation of self-regulation practices; however, other practices were less universal to the structure and curriculum in kindergarten classrooms than in pre-K classrooms.

Component 3: Family Learning Activities

During the 2016–17 school year, PKTP supported four community events hosted at elementary school sites (three Family Fun Hours and one capstone celebration). The goals of these events were to increase interactions between families and teachers and to model learning activities that parents could do at home. Staff representing the Altgeld health clinic and home visiting programs also hosted activity tables at spring 2017 events. At the science-themed Family Fun Hour observed by researchers, teachers facilitated four activities: making slime, building catapults using craft sticks and measuring the distance that objects flew, predicting whether objects would sink or float, and creating rainbows by dissolving candy in different liquids. Some parents helped their enthusiastic pre-K and kindergarten-aged children carry out the experiments; others filmed their children participating. Parents and children circulated among the activity tables during the hour-long event, and observation notes captured instances of teachers encouraging parents to replicate activities at home and catching up about how older siblings were doing. In observations of Teacher Transition Team meetings, teachers reflected on how these events stimulated their students and families, reporting that some families had asked for help in doing the learning activities at home. In interviews, they also noted that their families were excited about Family Fun Hours in particular because they were able to attend with all their children, not just those that were pre-K or kindergarten students as with other school events.

Approximately two-thirds (64%) of parents completing the spring 2017 surveys reported participating in at least one Family Fun Hour. However, this proportion ranged by site from a high of 88% of parents to a low of 14% of parents, with lower turnout from the center-based sites. These site differences were consistent with sign-in sheets from the four events, with families signing in from three sites at one Family Fun Hour, from four sites at two Family Fun Hours, and from all six sites at the capstone celebration event. In terms of event attendance, 30 to 50 students were present with family members at each of the three Family Fun Hours and more than 300 students and family members participated in the capstone celebration (out of roughly 350 families with pre-K or kindergarten students across the community). Teachers observed that a few families consistently attended throughout the school year, but that many of the families were new to Family Fun Hours at each event.

PKTP also supported field trips to two Chicago cultural institutions: the Chicago Children’s Museum (for paired pre-K and kindergarten classrooms) and the Museum of Science and Industry (for all 18 classrooms at the same time).¹⁰ The field trips brought together the pre-K and kindergarten classrooms. These events were designed to create new opportunities for children, families, and teachers to interact informally across grades. All sites participated in both field trips and caregivers volunteered as chaperones in large numbers. In observations of Teacher Transition Team meetings, teachers reported that students really enjoyed their visits and asked when they could return. Teachers also described their students as showing a high level of engagement in the play-based activities facilitated by the exhibits, which they contrasted with the limited play equipment available at some of their sites.

Timing, communication, and historical community divisions each influenced family participation.

While many families were engaged over the course of the year, they did not necessarily engage across existing subgroups within the community as envisioned in the design of this component. Teachers and families both offered explanations of the participation patterns by sites. Teachers reported that the timing and location of these events impacted who could and could not participate. For example, scheduling Family Fun Hours to coincide with the end of the school day at elementary school sites meant that the events did not align with when families picked up children at community-based pre-K programs. At the same time, whether the event was hosted at a school located within or outside of Altgeld Gardens (one large public housing development within Altgeld-Riverdale) had implications for families’ ability to travel to the events. Parents, however, emphasized that they sometimes did not know about the events far enough in advance to make changes in their work schedules or simply were not aware that the Family Fun Hours took place.

In addition, parents indicated that they did not always want to attend the Family Fun Hours not hosted at their own school. They discussed longstanding rivalries between specific elementary schools that had led to, for example, conflicts between parents after sports events and to parents being told “don’t come over here” by other parents. They also described community divisions and changes related to CHA’s remodeling of Altgeld Gardens and a sense that new families joining the community did not share the same values as longer-term residents. Some parents specifically commented that they felt less welcome at the Family Fun Hours not hosted at their own schools because they had not received packets of materials or been greeted like other parents. They also noted that they were more comfortable talking with the

¹⁰ Findings draw on teacher and family reports about field trips as researchers did not observe these events.

teachers that they knew and did not know whether they were invited to participate in activities facilitated by teachers at other centers and schools.

Summary of Component 3: Family learning activities. These reflections suggest that new strategies for promoting the events, experimentation with different time options, and strengthening facilitation might foster more consistent participation of families across all six sites. These comments also highlight the influence of the community context in which PKTP is being implemented.

Differences in PKTP Implementation across Sites

Understanding PKTP in full requires considering how it is experienced across multiple layers of systems—from individuals to schools to the community. Beyond understanding the individual and interpersonal successes and challenges, our findings also point to the influence of schools on the implementation and uptake of the PKTP components.

Although there are only a small number of sites, and small number of pre-K and kindergarten teachers in Altgeld-Riverdale (see the Research Methods section), survey responses indicated some differences between sites that were consistent with interview and observation data. Sites where teachers exhibited less positive responses around perceived support from leaders in the community for PKTP and the practices encouraged (e.g., observing cross-grade classrooms) were also less likely to find the PKTP meetings useful and less likely to completely agree that participating in PKTP helped them better understand the pre-K to kindergarten transition and how to prepare children and families for it. These were also sites where the lowest proportion of parent survey responders said they attended Family Fun Hours. It is possible that the differences in site-specific support for participating in PKTP played a role. For instance, as described on page 19, in one of these sites there was a designated person who attended Teacher Transition Team meetings and conveyed information to other teachers and staff. In contrast, at other sites, more teachers had the opportunity to directly participate. Differences in the implementation of the program might have influenced teachers' individual buy-in.

These differences are not surprising given research showing that teachers' ability to successfully implement practices depends partially on the conditions under which they are teaching. School climate and whether leaders set up protective and collaborative structures can either support or hinder the work of teachers (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Kraft & Papay, 2015; Pallas & Buckley, 2012; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). In both K–12 and early childhood settings—school- and center-based—

having strong instructional leadership and a sense of collective responsibility and collaboration among teachers is related to better outcomes.¹¹ Children, families, and teachers in Altgeld-Riverdale face a challenging economy and high rates of crime (see Community Background box on page 10). Under these conditions it is even *more* critical that staff are supported by their school leaders and colleagues (Bryk et al., 2010).

In what ways did PKTP participation influence 1) relationships among teachers and families and 2) communication about the importance of the transition?

We found that across grade levels and schools, teachers reported a greater sense of community and teachers and parents described feeling more connected to each other as a result of participation in PKTP's family learning activities. We also found, via surveys, that PKTP as a program helped pre-K teachers better understand transitions, more so than kindergarten teachers. However, participation in PKTP did not clearly convey the importance of transition activities to families.

Pre-K and kindergarten teachers reported a greater sense of community across grade levels and schools because of their participation in PKTP. Teachers reported that overall, they felt more connected to each other as a result of participation in PKTP. "It feels good to be among other teachers and to get some answers," explained one teacher. Before PKTP, teachers described having limited to no contact with teachers at other schools and centers in the community, much less the kind of collaborative activities they were currently engaged in. One participant described her sense of connection with other teachers in this way:

We get to know each other. We have definitely built a rapport with one another. If someone needs assistance, we're not afraid to ask for it. If a teacher has a question and I have the answer, they're comfortable enough because we've been around each other to receive what I have to say.

Teachers' comments were consistent with analysis of Teacher Transition Team observations conducted by the research team, which showed that teachers developed stronger cross-grade and cross-site

¹¹ In K–12 settings, school climate, as measured by the 5Essentials survey, was related to later improvements in student test scores and attendance (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Klugman, Gordon, Sebring, & Spote, 2015). In early education settings, new research shows a concurrent relationship between essential organizational conditions at CLASS Pre-K scores as well as student attendance (Ehrlich, Pacchiano, Stein, & Wagner, 2018).

relationships and engaged in deeper conversations about practice as the school year progressed. As one teacher described the culture of these meetings in an interview, "You don't have to be on your p's and q's. This is a place where. . . whatever you [have] on your mind, say it."

Teachers reported that they valued the sense of community they developed through PKTP in particular because of the uniqueness of the Altgeld-Riverdale community. They reported that supporting and being supported by other teachers to meet the needs of students was crucial. They valued the learning that came from discussions at the Teacher Transition Team meetings and from informal conversations between the meetings. Teachers explained that it could be hard to put into words all of the concerns they had for students and their families until they came together with colleagues and realized that they had many of the same concerns. Understanding that fellow teachers shared many of the same experiences and challenges in the classroom helped teachers feel as though they were "not alone," as one teacher put it. Another teacher described hearing what other teachers experienced as "a release—I'm not the only one" and valued the opportunity to learn from the strategies that other teachers were using to support their students.

Parents and teachers reported feeling more connected with each other through the family learning activities. Parents who participated in focus groups reported that they felt more connected with teachers at their own schools and centers as a result of the increased interaction facilitated by using PKTP components. The field trips and Family Fun Hours seemed to help parents and teachers develop new social connections, build rapport, and begin to establish trust with one another. The field trips served as a way for teachers and parents to spend more relaxed time together talking about topics that may or may not be about parents' children and how they're faring at school and in the classroom. One parent put it this way: "You get to spend time with the teachers that you wouldn't normally spend. The teachers tend to communicate with the parents on the field trip a little bit more. And then from that you develop a relationship with the teachers." Similarly, parents said that Family Fun Hours allowed them to have fun with their children while spending time with teachers in an environment where they were not necessarily focused on the academic needs or behavioral issues of their children. As one parent put it, "Instead of coming in, 'Well, you know [student] did this. . . .' It's not any of that attitude going on. . . . They tell you your kids are doing this. It's more inviting. And that's better for the parents too."

These opportunities supported the strengthening of relationships between children and family members, schools, and the community—all of which contribute to students' transition experiences. For example, many parents reported feeling comfortable talking with their child's teacher about how they encourage

learning at home (72%). At the same time, teachers also experienced some change. Three of the eight teachers interviewed reported feeling stronger connections with their students' families as a result of participating in PKTP family learning activities.

Families contrasted PKTP's "fun" family learning activities with more traditional school engagement practices. They reported that both of these events provided an important—and different—way to get to know current and potential future teachers informally and talk with them about their children. A parent described the events as also promoting students' confidence in their ability to introduce themselves to other students that attend different schools. "And also spending time with their family, fun time, not 'we gotta hurry up and do this, we gotta do your homework.' You know it's just something fun and they're also learning." Teachers similarly valued the opportunity to meet and interact with the families of their students in the Family Fun Hour and field trip formats. "It's just reassuring for me that I'm comfortable with calling that parent to let them know what's going on. . . that I'm always looking out for the child," explained one teacher.

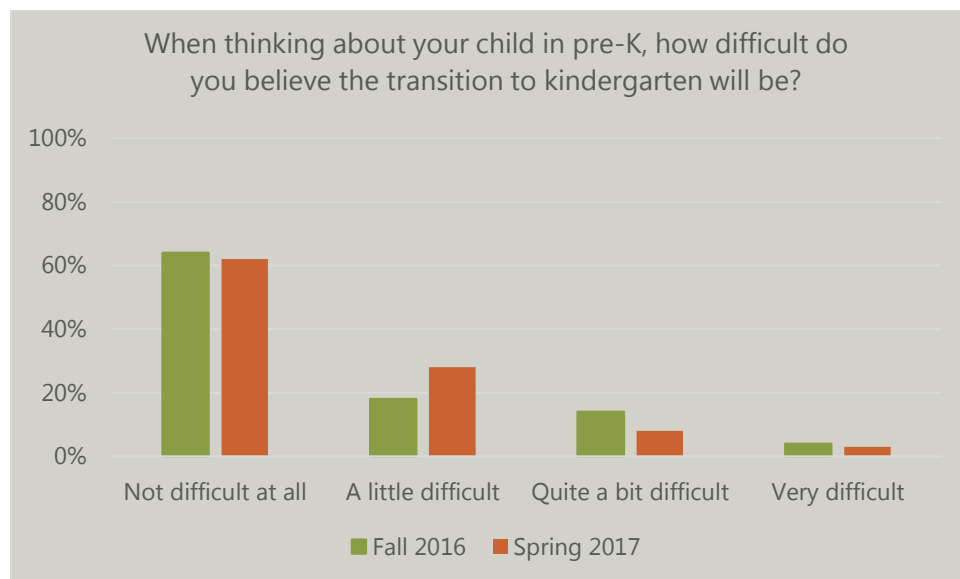
PKTP helped contribute to a larger sense of community around children's needs in pre-K and kindergarten. Building on the notion that PKTP is embedded within multiple levels of a larger system, as shown in ecological systems theory, evidence suggests that PKTP was valued as building a community-wide understanding of the importance of transition for students. The simple fact that PKTP was implemented with all schools and centers across Altgeld-Riverdale brought together staff and families from across the full community. "It brings together schools. It brings together families. It brings together the children. So it's a win-win as far as I can see," reported one teacher. Another teacher named one specific benefit of the community-wide focus on transitions as helping pre-K students build relationships with kindergarten teachers across all four elementary schools in Altgeld-Riverdale. She explained that PKTP's community approach "broke that ice." She described having students that had been part of PKTP's pilot year tell her, "I know [my kindergarten teacher]. I met her already."

PKTP also helped teachers get to know the community much more than they had in the past by fostering new lines of communication between teachers and families across schools and centers. One teacher, who had been at her site for several years, said, "Before, we'd have activities at the school, but we weren't reaching out to the whole Altgeld community. This project allowed us to reach out to everyone in the community." Another teacher described her PKTP participation as driven by two distinct aspirations: to make transitions to kindergarten easier for all children and to generally help "the schools to work more side by side."

PKTP did not clearly convey to parents its focus on transition. Relationships seemed to flourish through PKTP, but a focus on the transition from pre-K to kindergarten was less clear. Transitions underpinned PKTP activities, but this topic wasn't consistently made explicit with parents or teachers. Supporting children's transitions was an implicit, rather than explicit, part of creating these interactive learning activities when teachers planned for family learning activities during Teacher Transition Team meetings, as reflected by analysis of meeting observations and minutes. PKTP's family learning experiences component provided infrastructure for a transition practice that the literature suggests is promising but is rarely implemented: one-on-one conversations with parents (as opposed to large group meetings) prior to the beginning of the kindergarten year (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008). Without specific instructional materials or guidance from PKTP about how to engage with parents about the kindergarten transition in these conversations, the focus on transitions remained implicit in the informal relationships and connections built between teachers and parents.

Study data did not provide direct evidence of what teachers conveyed to parents about the kindergarten transition. Survey data show a slight decrease in parents' reports of preparation for the transition to kindergarten (comparing the responses of pre-K parents at the end of PKTP's first year with the responses of kindergarten parents reporting on the prior year). At the same time, there was a small decrease over time in how difficult pre-K parents thought the kindergarten transition would be for their children, as shown in Figure 5. In the spring, 11% of pre-K parents thought the kindergarten transition would be quite a bit difficult or very difficult for their child, in contrast to 18% in the fall. This suggests there is room for improvement in terms of explicitly supporting pre-K parents in their preparation for their child's upcoming kindergarten transition.

Figure 5. Parents Were Slightly More Likely to Believe the Transition to Kindergarten Would Be Difficult When Asked in the Fall Compared to the Spring.



There were grade-level differences in teachers’ reports about PKTP’s focus on transition. Among teachers, there were notable grade-level differences in teachers’ reports about how PKTP contributed to their own understanding of and ability to support children’s transitions. Sixty-seven percent of pre-K teachers and 25% of kindergarten teachers completely agreed that participating in PKTP had helped them better understand transitions in the spring survey. Similar proportions of pre-K and kindergarten teachers completely agreed that participating in PKTP had helped them better understand the needs of their students around transition (73% of pre-K teachers and 50% of kindergarten teachers) and how to prepare students and their families for transition (73% of pre-K teachers and 25% of kindergarten teachers).

Consistent with survey findings, in interviews pre-K teachers also talked about becoming more familiar with kindergarten expectations as a result of participating in PKTP. For example, one teacher said she often wondered, “Am I doing the right thing? . . . as far as preparing the kids for kindergarten.” For this teacher, hearing about kindergarten teachers’ expectations through her participation in PKTP helped her better understand the degree to which what she was already doing aligned to those expectations.

Pre-K teachers reported applying some of what they had learned through participating in PKTP to how they implemented existing practices to support families around transitions. For example, in interviews, teachers at the two community-based centers described expanding upon existing practices of organizing field trips for children and their families to visit schools in the community as part of their participation in PKTP. Parents also described having talked with pre-K teachers about different aspects of development

important for kindergarten, such as sense of self and independence, taking responsibility for their behavior, and learning well with others in focus groups.

Overall, we found that PKTP contributed to a greater sense of connection among teachers and families, as well as a sense of community around children's needs in pre-K and kindergarten. However, the focus on transition within and across PKTP components was less clear to participants, suggesting an important opportunity to build upon the foundation established during this first year of implementation.

Limitations

As an observational study with a limited sample of data to draw from, this research has three main limitations. First, the study captured the first year of PKTP implementation, the 2016–17 school year, rather than the actual transition experiences of children and their families from pre-K to kindergarten. We tried to capture changes to families' experiences around transitions by comparing responses of kindergarten parents in the fall of 2016 (of their prior experience in spring 2016) to pre-K parents in the spring of 2017. However, it is possible that a retrospective look by kindergarten parents is not the same as in-the-moment experiences of pre-K parents.

Second, findings cannot be generalized to the population of teachers and families in the community. We expect that study data and resulting findings overrepresent the perspectives of individuals willing to share their time and experiences with researchers, particularly as participants noted general differences in the level of community engagement between old and new community residents and between those who lived in public housing and those who did not. As a result, the study may not have captured potentially important differences related to these divisions in the community.

Finally, the study did not include observations of classroom-level implementation or assess student-level outcomes for PKTP. Both of these strategies will strengthen the validity of findings related to implementation and outcomes in future research on PKTP and build understanding of how this program may be scalable to other communities and settings.

Conclusion

Along with other efforts supported by BPI in Altgeld-Riverdale, PKTP seeks to support young children in their early educational experiences by coordinating work towards a common goal: strengthening pre-K to kindergarten transitions. This study and report focused on the first year of implementation to understand the key components of the program, what implementation looked like, possible conditions that encouraged involvement, and how teachers and families experienced the program. Through the implementation of PKTP's three components—professional learning community, a set of common classroom practices, and family learning experiences—program designers hoped to create smoother transition experiences for families and children. The program designers also hoped to improve both academic and social-emotional transitions and teachers decided to do this by focusing on students' social-emotional development. PKTP was also designed as a new type of transitions model that builds across the whole community, rather than bridging one or two individual educational settings. PKTP attempts to address the pre-K and kindergarten grade-level differences that are central to the transitions focus of most alignment efforts and to create a deeper connection across grades (pre-K and kindergarten), among schools and centers, and between teachers and families.

Teachers, families, and PKTP project staff experienced both successes and challenges as they participated in PKTP's three components. Implementation also helped surface community-level challenges that initially weren't explicitly recognized, but which are critical to building a community approach to supporting transitions. Through this study, it became apparent that the early successes of PKTP were much less about the implementation of individual transition practices (e.g., a particular common classroom practice) and much more about the sense of community it was helping to foster—even if only for a subgroup of teachers and families.

PKTP helped bring together those working with pre-K and kindergarten students and families—not only from across schools, but also across agencies, including Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Department for Family Supports & Services. In meetings with teachers and leaders, staff unanimously indicated that there were no prior structures that brought them together, even though they were all tasked with serving children and families in the same community. Teacher Transition Team meetings included not only efforts to understand ways to support the transition between pre-K and kindergarten, but also efforts to open dialogue that allowed teachers to understand the differences and (more importantly) similarities between their schools. Families have far more actors within the community

supporting them, including the Chicago Housing Authority, a community health clinic (TCA Health), and Chicago Public Library. Integrating these groups more deeply into the transitions work would likely help to strengthen the sense of community and broaden the reach.

Challenges, Facilitators, and Implications for Practice

The work of PKTP in Altgeld-Riverdale is just beginning. As we consider the broader implications of this work, this study gleaned several findings that can guide the planning work of others interested in strengthening alignment across grades, educational settings, and systems. These include consideration of who leads the work, defining the key terms that drive the work, and the role of community building as a foundation for strengthening the transition experiences of children, families, and teachers.

What created challenges for PKTP implementation?

- 1. Structural differences across education settings can pose barriers to consistent implementation.** PKTP intentionally included all pre-K and kindergarten classrooms in the community, drawing from education settings with different approaches to supporting rigorous and developmentally appropriate instruction. Not surprisingly, teachers, parents, and school/center leaders brought different assumptions to the table. Despite the fact that, as a group, teachers selected the common classroom practices because of their relevance, pre-K and kindergarten teachers differed in the degree to which they believed some of PKTP's common classroom practices aligned with school/center curricula, goals, and expectations. There were differences between the education settings in terms of how students' developmental and academic progress was assessed, and the degree to which family learning activities were already part of regular, formalized structures. Families also differed in their perceptions of the quality of different education settings in the community and expressed concerns that teachers did not necessarily communicate about how students were doing and what family members could do to help. School and center leaders also differed in their expectations for what high quality pre-K and kindergarten experiences looked like and the accountability metrics for which they were held responsible.
- 2. Lack of clear definitions around "supporting transitions" can lead to less coherence in implementation.** PKTP was predicated on the idea that teachers and families would learn how to better support transitions between pre-K and kindergarten across the community's multiple

education settings. However, overlapping with the barrier related to structural differences across education settings, the term “transition” can mean different things to different people. This may have been true in the PKTP project, where a clear articulation of what “supporting transitions” meant for teachers was missing. In fact, the field more generally uses “transitions” as a catch-all that includes, among other things: (1) academic preparation for children entering kindergarten (kindergarten readiness skills), (2) social-emotional/behavioral preparation for kindergarten, (3) alignment of curricula and assessments, (4) creating more consistent and familiar environments that ease the transition for children and families from pre-K into kindergarten, and (5) knowing how to apply for/enroll in kindergarten. The lack of clear definition as part of PKTP may, over time, leave teachers and families wondering how each practice aligns with the overall transition goal of the program. Ongoing implementation may also generate greater cohesiveness and alignment across participating schools and centers.

- 3. Lack of clear alignment with curriculum can create implementation barriers for some teachers.** Increasing the coherence of curriculum with teaching and learning goals and activities—alignment—is a frequent focus of reform efforts in education. Though PKTP’s approach created flexibility for multiple schools/centers to engage in the program, for some teachers, PKTP’s lack of clear alignment with their curricula was an implementation challenge. Teachers believed that some of the common classroom practices strongly aligned with the curricula, goals, and visions of their sites while others did not. These beliefs aligned with teachers’ reports about how often they implemented each type of practice. This points to the importance of systems and structures that create not only alignment across different types of settings, but—even more evident here—vertical alignment between pre-K and kindergarten, even when the two grades are both located within the same school. In addition, while teachers reported that administrators were, overall, supportive of their participation in PKTP, differences in site participation across PKTP’s three components suggested the ongoing importance of clear alignment with curriculum and organizational vision for implementation on a daily basis.
- 4. Intentional efforts to bring families together in ways that encourage fun and informal interactions can support engagement, but are difficult to implement.** The transitions literature highlights the importance of multiple and differently structured ways of engaging families. The inclusion of pre-K and kindergarten teachers across all schools and early childhood centers for regular meeting time rarely happens. The field trips and the Family Fun Hours brought

together teachers and families in informal ways, allowing them to get to know each other better and build a stronger foundation for supporting their children. Nevertheless, staffing and sustaining diverse opportunities for family engagement across the community presented challenges. In Altgeld-Riverdale, as in other communities nationally, pre-K parents were more likely to have been involved at schools/centers than kindergarten parents. The Family Fun Hours and field trips added new activities beyond what had been done in the past, but families' own perceptions of what counts as meaningful engagement with the teachers of their children also varied. In addition, timing, communication, and historical community divisions influenced family participation.

What facilitated the implementation of PKTP?

- 1. PKTP's design decision not to adopt a specific curriculum provided flexibility in what implementers could focus on.** While adopting a specific curriculum provides a set of prescribed goals, definitions, and expectations, this approach also limits the degree to which teachers can decide how to address their own needs and the needs of their students within the community context. In the first full year of implementation, pre-K and kindergarten teachers played a leading role in crafting the three components. Because the common classroom practices and other components were co-developed, there was deeper buy-in to this voluntary program. At the same time, the program was adaptable to the ongoing needs of teachers and the community as teachers worked to deepen implementation. Engagement was high in the first full year of implementation. It will be important to ensure that flexible approach also includes the communication of a consistent vision for PKTP to support engagement and participation in the future.
- 2. Having regular teacher meetings laid the foundation for building all aspects of PKTP.** Just as ongoing opportunities for teachers to learn from each other are important for professional growth, the monthly Teacher Transition Team meetings supported teachers in their implementation work by building a sense of connectedness. School and center leaders' support for regular attendance at the meetings also fostered teachers' understanding of how to address student needs in community context through PKTP's common classroom practices and family learning activities. During this first year of implementation, the relationships and trust built across schools and grade levels developed because teachers began to really get to know each other.

Without consistent time to convene, discuss, and collaborate around their work, the community aspect of this program would not have a strong foundation.

- 3. PKTP's components mutually reinforced each other over time.** Having the freedom to determine what would work best to bring together and support teachers, children, and families allowed implementers to adjust PKTP as they learned what worked—and what did not. The experience of teachers with PKTP suggests that, for programs that intentionally do not include a curriculum, greater successes are likely to occur when those who are implementing the program (i.e., practitioners) understand components as interrelated and building on each other over time. For example, just within the component of common classroom practices, some PKTP teachers reported that the practices they were implementing were mutually reinforcing for their students. Dramatic play, for example, provided opportunities for students to practice self-regulation (as well as extend the academic work happening throughout the school day). Similarly, different components of PKTP reinforced one another. While both common classroom practices and Teacher Transition Team meetings held some value for teachers and other staff members, in combination they were even more effective. Discussion at these meetings related to teachers' experiences with the common classroom practices provided much of the content supporting ongoing implementation.
- 4. The external facilitator played a key role in implementing PKTP.** Facilitation of professional learning communities in education varies according to the stages of building a professional learning culture. With PKTP, the original design intent was to hand off PKTP to teachers following the pilot year. However, the time necessary to plan Teacher Transition Team meetings, field trips, and Family Fun Hours was substantial. It would be difficult for teachers to invest this kind of time above and beyond the responsibilities they already have. The external facilitator helped ensure that these activities were planned and reflected, in an unbiased way, on the conversations occurring at the meetings so that future meetings are better able to meet the needs of the teachers. Those implementing programs that bring together staff from multiple schools should consider the support an external facilitator can provide in holding and communicating a consistent vision of the work, particularly within the context of teacher and administrator turnover from one year to the next.
- 5. Several years of building professional and personal relationships preceded the work of collaborating around transitions across grades and schools.** One frequently cited

transitions framework stresses the importance of selecting and implementing a range of practices that can be flexibly applied to the needs of individual children, families, and schools (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000). The first full year of PKTP implementation, which took place after two years of planning and a pilot year, highlights the importance of community building as a foundation for this type of work. While there were important differences between grades and sites that have implications for future implementation, teachers had begun to see themselves as part of a broader community that went beyond the walls of their individual schools and centers. The significant growth in teachers' level of comfort discussing their challenges supporting students and offering implementation advice to each other is one example of PKTP's successes in fostering the collaborative relationships that are fundamental to creating alignment between pre-K and kindergarten.

Implications for Practice

- **Community-building efforts provided a foundation for the process of creating alignment between pre-K and kindergarten.** Prior to implementation, project staff from BPI engaged pre-K and kindergarten teachers and administrators across the community in a series of knowledge exchanges and planning meetings. These efforts provided an important foundation for implementation across grades and schools, even across pre-K and kindergarten classrooms within the same school. Teachers reported that the PKTP's community-wide focus was unique and central to their engagement and implementation work. They indicated that prior to participation in PKTP, they had limited to no opportunity to engage with educators outside of their sites and little familiarity with the teaching methods and philosophies used at other grade levels outside of the program. The significant growth in teachers' level of comfort discussing their challenges supporting students and offering implementation advice to each other is one example of PKTP's successes in fostering the collaborative relationships that are fundamental to creating alignment between pre-K and kindergarten. Despite these connections across the community, in practice structural differences between participating education settings (school-based vs. center-based pre-K programs, neighborhood vs. charter elementary schools) posed some barriers to consistent implementation and are important contextual nuances to attend to when implementing a community-wide approach.
- **Focusing on key components rather than a structured curriculum, and co-developing the program with—rather than for—teachers, allowed for flexibility in what**

practitioners could focus on. Teachers characterized the design decision to determine and focus on “key components” of the program, but not a specific curriculum, as both a facilitator and a barrier. For this program, not having a transitions curriculum created important flexibility to respond to teacher and student needs in local community context and across diverse educational settings. At the same time, variation in perceptions of PKTP’s alignment with the curricula, goals, and visions of schools and centers created implementation barriers for some teachers. Teachers also reported that as co-designers of the PKTP common classroom practices, these practices aligned with student needs. They also developed the content for family learning activities and established priorities for their professional learning community. While there were important grade-level and site differences in implementation, participants reported that the components were mutually reinforcing over time and that the combination of the three core components facilitated both classroom and community transitions work. It will be important to ensure that flexible approach also includes the communication of a consistent vision for PKTP to support engagement and participation in the future.

- Having an external facilitator proved key for ongoing collaboration and successful implementation of PKTP. The time necessary to plan professional learning community meetings, field trips, and family learning activities was substantial. Having BPI as an external facilitator and coordinator relieved teachers of these responsibilities—and teacher ownership would have been hard to sustain. In addition, an external facilitator is uniquely positioned to reflect on how to design future meetings to better meet the needs of all teachers and families across the community. Those implementing programs that bring together staff from multiple schools should consider the support an external facilitator can provide in communicating a consistent vision of the work, particularly within the context of teacher and administrator turnover from one year to the next.

Directions for Future Research

First, we see a need for greater focus on community context and the influence of diverse educational settings on the implementation of transitions programs. In this report, analyses focused on capturing implementation fidelity and evidence of the program’s influences on anticipated outcomes. In a field that has been largely conceptual to date, there is work to be done to understand how grade-level differences in beliefs and attitudes, the culture and climate of individual schools/centers, and leadership factors

influence the implementation of transitions programs—and specifically, teachers’ motivation and skill in changing classroom practice.

Second, we believe it is important to capture and foreground diverse family experiences of the transition into early elementary school. As we discussed above, this study relied on schools/centers as data collection sites and they supported our efforts to engage families in research activities. We see partnering with community organizations and adding community-based strategies to engage families that are less well-connected with their schools/centers as ways to deepen understanding of how families experience PKTP.

Third, as researchers continue to study kindergarten transition experiences and programs, we encourage them to focus on the ways in which *relationships* influence implementation and the experiences teachers and families have with those programs. Implementation research has long focused on the installation of program “infrastructure” and fidelity to the model to explain observed successes, challenges, and impact. Consistent with a recent review of implementation research (Century & Cassata, 2016), findings highlighted the importance of relationships as a motor for the transitions work being undertaken and hinted at how professional learning community can foster the development of critical relational infrastructure.

Finally, we view the exploration of program impact as a next step in understanding the potential value of scaling PKTP to other communities. Future research on impact should explicitly examine family and systems outcomes relevant to PKTP’s community approach, in addition to the student-level school engagement and academic outcomes typically studied in educational interventions.

In closing, research shows the importance of children’s experience with the transition from pre-K into early elementary grades. To improve the quality and coherence of children’s learning experiences in early childhood and early elementary grades, this literature points to the critical importance of smoothing linkages between pre-K and kindergarten. PKTP represents an attempt within one community to start improving the transition experience of students. Their story may offer lessons for others working on implementing transitions programs, particularly those adopting a community approach. In Altgeld-Riverdale, we hope these findings support ongoing improvements to the program.¹² More broadly, we

¹² Appendix C summarizes two adjustments to 2017-18 implementation introduced by BPI project staff in response to preliminary study findings.

hope that this study can inform ongoing planning in the city of Chicago and other regions to engage teachers and families to design transitions programming that responds to student and family needs within the community context.

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Appendix A

Study Instruments and Participant Recruitment Strategies

Teacher and family surveys. Researchers administered anonymous teacher and family surveys electronically at the beginning and end of the school year. Teacher surveys were conducted online, while parent surveys were conducted in person using electronic tablets at each center and school. Both the teacher and parent surveys gathered information about relationships with school, parents, and teachers; perspectives on school climate; and experiences with PKTP. Teacher surveys also collected information about the implementation of transition practices. Parent surveys included additional question about beliefs regarding their children’s school readiness, ease of the kindergarten transition, expectations for how teachers should prepare families for transition, and preparation for kindergarten enrollment.

Community Background

Four kindergarten classrooms and 14 pre-K classrooms participated in PKTP. Of the 20 teachers who completed the spring survey, 80% taught pre-K and the remainder taught kindergarten. This distribution reflects the overall distribution of pre-K and kindergarten classrooms within the community. Half of survey respondents had been teaching pre-K or kindergarten for at least five years ($n = 11$), but it was also common for teachers to be in their first year at their school or center ($n = 5$). Almost all teachers ($n = 17$) held either a bachelor’s degree or a master’s degree and most ($n = 13$) held a state certification in early childhood.

Teacher interviews. Researchers conducted one-hour semi-structured interviews with eight teachers at the end of the school year. Participants were purposively sampled to include representation from each of the six sites, a mix of pre-K and kindergarten experiences, and a mix of teachers who did and did not regularly attend Teacher Transition Team meetings. Teachers were recruited through individual outreach by researchers and interviewed at their sites. The interview protocol was designed to capture teachers’ PKTP experiences; transitions practices; beliefs, attitudes, and experiences with the transition to kindergarten; and relationships with school, teachers, and parents.

Family focus groups. Researchers facilitated six one-hour focus groups with the family members of pre-K- and kindergarten-aged students. Each focus group was hosted at a center or school and scheduled

to align with established drop-off or pick-up schedules. Focus group participants were recruited by sending flyers home with children and partnering with teachers and administrative staff to encourage participation.

PKTP activity observations. Researchers observed and took field notes at five of the eight Teacher Transition Team meetings held over the school year and one of the four Family Fun Hours hosted in Altgeld-Riverdale. The observed activities were sampled to capture the evolution of the cross-grade, cross-school professional learning community (beginning, middle, and end of the school year), and the arc of the “plan, do, reflect” cycle used to support ongoing implementation of common classroom practices and family learning activities. We analyzed field notes to identify cross-grade and cross-school participation patterns and refine interview and focus group protocols.

Document review. Researchers leveraged implementation documentation created by project staff, including meeting agendas, minutes, attendance sheets, fidelity forms for common classroom practice implementation, and project staff notes reflecting on successes and challenges following PKTP activities. We analyzed these documents to deepen and cross-check understanding of emergent findings, as well as to map implementation fidelity for specific indicators.

Appendix B

PKTP Implementation Resources Supporting the Common Classroom Practices

- **Practices to promote self-regulation.** Materials and professional development to support teachers' ongoing implementation of several practices to promote self-regulation, including the Tucker the Turtle calming technique (described above) and activities using a car to help to children use the idea of different zones of regulation to describe how their brains and bodies feel.
- **Trauma-sensitive practices.** Materials and professional development to support teachers' ongoing implementation of the use of a "feelings" chart to help children identify their feelings in combination with calming exercises and the particular social emotional learning curriculum supported by their schools/centers. PKTP also brought in external experts to deliver professional development on trauma-sensitive practices in spring 2017.
- **Practices to promote dramatic play.** Professional development on the implementation of dramatic play that was differentiated by grade level and led by external CPS pre-K and kindergarten teachers. Time at Teacher Transitions Team meetings about teachers' use of dramatic play centers (areas of the classroom where students explore different roles and situations as they engage in pretend play) with themes related to their curriculum and/or student interests and changing these themes on a bimonthly basis.

Appendix C

PKTP 2017–18 Updates

BPI project staff introduced two main adjustments for the 2017–18 school year in response to preliminary findings from this study.

The first adjustment was made in response to the finding that parents who participated in PKTP activities did not necessarily understand that there was a focus on the importance of transition. BPI project staff developed a pre-K to kindergarten transition logo to include on all materials (i.e., fliers for Family Fun Nights, permission slips for field trips, newsletters home to families) to brand the program and ensure parents were able to draw a connection between all of the program's activities. Teachers also used afterschool family learning activities and field trips as an opportunity to reiterate the goals and messages of PKTP to parents and caregivers.

The second adjustment was made in response to the finding that pre-K and kindergarten teachers implemented the self-regulation practices consistently, but dramatic play and trauma-sensitive practices were implemented with less frequency. BPI project staff explored why this was the case. They identified one contributing factor as being differences in the supports specific to each practice that were provided through PKTP. They concluded that another factor was the fact that teachers were provided specific self-regulation strategies and tools, such as a Tucker the Turtle puppet and storybook as well as phone apps that demonstrate breathing and yoga techniques. In contrast, trauma-sensitive practices were presented to the teachers in a more conceptual way. Although the teachers received several professional development trainings on trauma-sensitive practices, they expressed they were still having difficulty identifying and implementing specific techniques they could apply in their classrooms.

To strengthen teachers' implementation of trauma-sensitive practices, BPI project staff explored strategies for commissioning a trauma therapist to work with the children and teachers. BPI ultimately partnered with Juvenile Protective Association (JPA) to hire a part-time licensed social worker/therapist to work with all six sites participating in PKTP. Each month, she provides a play-based lesson to each of the 18 pre-K and kindergarten classrooms based on a topic from a list created by the teachers. During the lesson, she models trauma-sensitive language and teaching techniques for the teachers and other school staff who wish to sit in on the lesson. The therapist also conducts monthly one-on-one consultations with each pre-

K and kindergarten teacher to provide techniques for addressing specific behaviors in certain students and more general tips on how to develop and maintain a trauma-sensitive classroom. The 2017–18 school year is the first year of this partnership. Teachers have already shared feedback with BPI project staff that it is helpful it is to have a professional therapist serving as an additional resource in their classrooms.

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Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center at the University of Chicago focused on providing public and private decision-makers with rigorous data analysis and achievable solutions to support them in improving the lives of children, families and communities. Chapin Hall partners with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real-world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for children and families. Established in 1985, Chapin Hall's areas of research include child welfare systems, community capacity to support children and families, and youth homelessness.

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OUR MISSION The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium) conducts research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. The UChicago Consortium encourages the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school reform by identifying what matters for student success and school improvement, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.

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