



A BROADENED VIEW OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS



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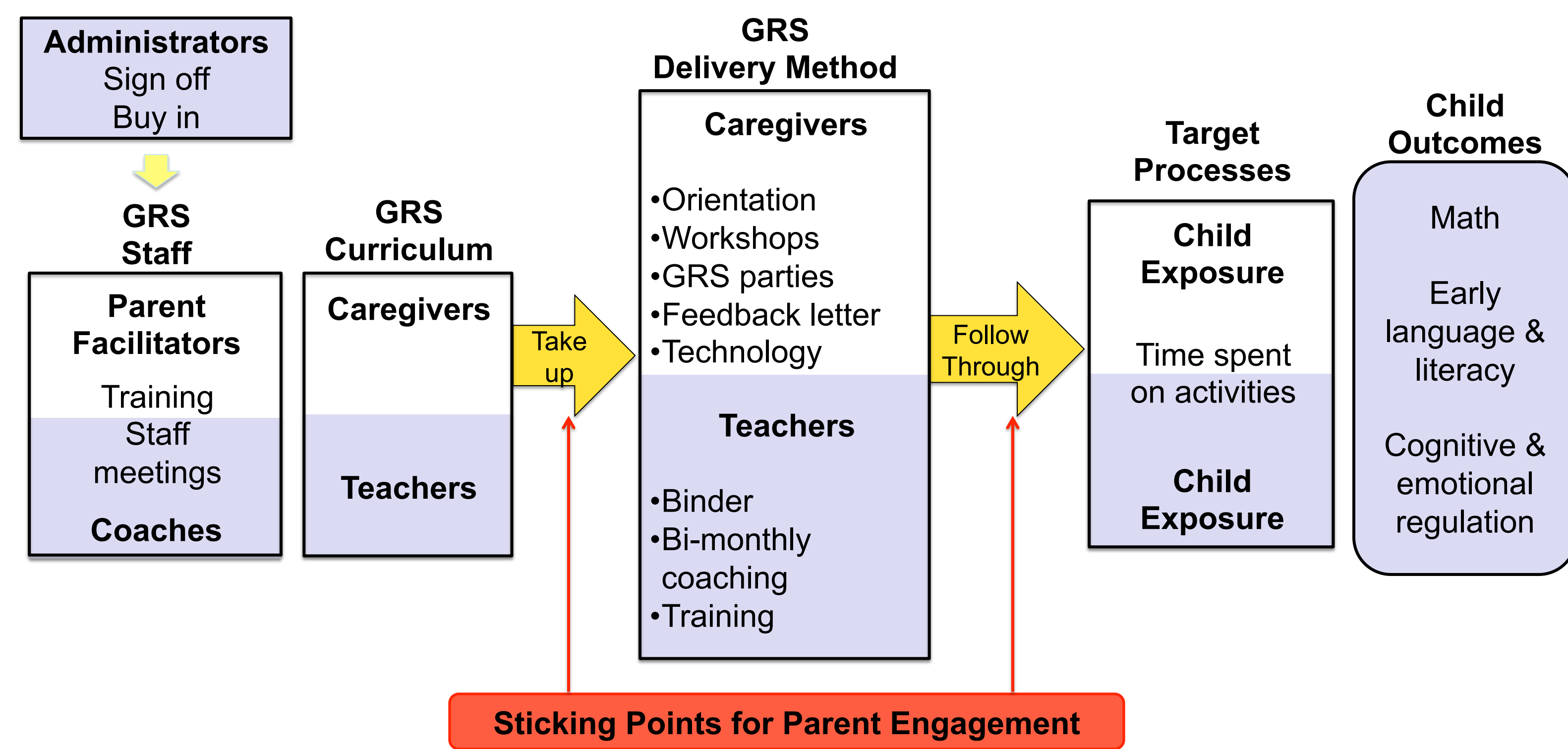
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The Program: GRS

The Getting Ready for School (GRS) Program

- ... Interactive, play-based activities
- ... Coordinated home and preschool components
 - **Preschool:** Add-on lessons can be used with any curriculum
 - **Parent:** Can be implemented alone
- ... Targets all three school readiness domains: Math, literacy, & self-regulation

Figure 1. The GRS Logic Model & Parent Engagement



Contribution

Parents are busy...even with the best of intentions to become and stay engaged in early childhood programming, the stress created by daily pressures – and by poverty – can interfere.

Drawing on the behavioral sciences, we explore the possibility that parents' ability to participate and follow through with valuable programs is affected by the cognitive resources that affect decision-making: attention, overconfidence, and misunderstanding the value of future rewards.

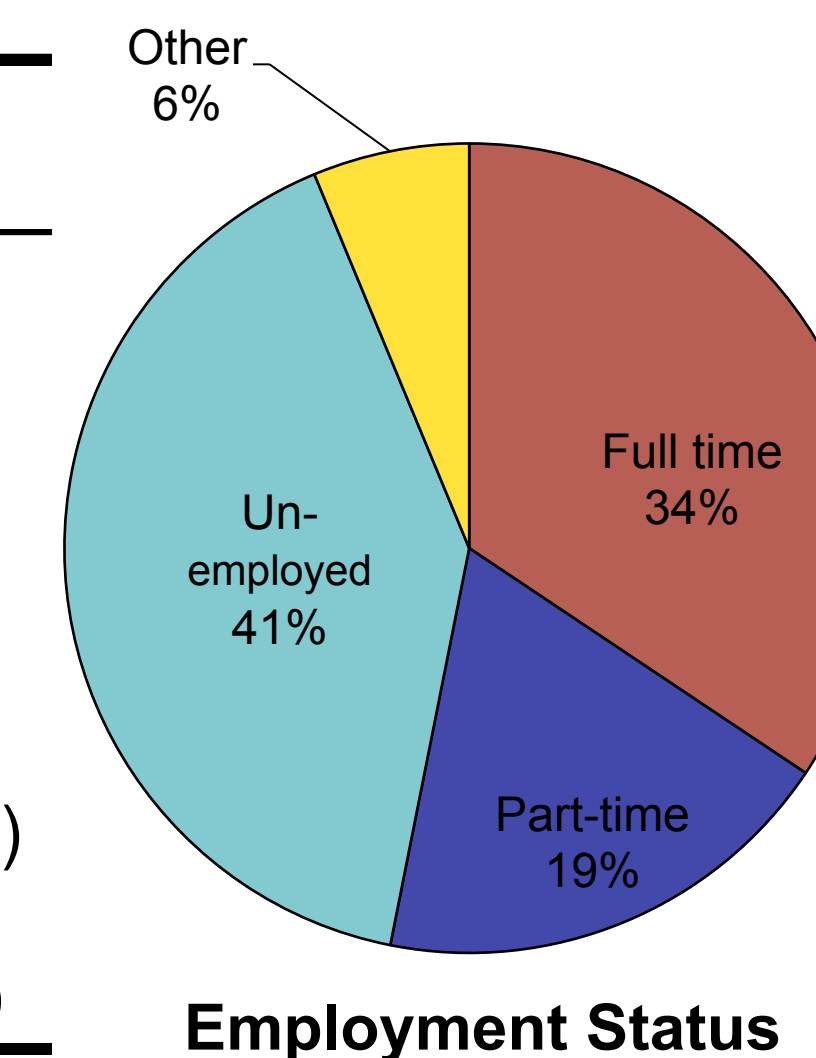
We do not directly measure cognitive resources; rather, we use parents' own perspectives to identify "bandwidth barriers and facilitators" that affect parents' ability to engage with the GRS program. [See beELL.org for more information.]

Participants

- 42 parents of preschoolers (24 boys, 18 girls), recruited from 4 Head Start programs in New York City that participate in the GRS program
- Parents were divided into 3 groups using school-based forms of engagement: *No Participation* (10%), *Low Engagers* (30%), and *High Engagers* (60%)

Table 1. Demographics for Parents Participating in Focus Groups

	No Participation	Low Engagers	High Engagers	Total Sample
<i>n</i>	4	12	26	42
Number of boys/girls	3/1	7/5	14/12	24/18
Parent language	1/3	5/7	10/16	16/26
Spanish/English				
Birth country				
US	2	4	6	12
Other	0	6	13	19
Years in US	-	13.80 (7.86)	18.80 (11.63)	17.13 (10.51)
Household size	5.50 (2.12)	4.60 (1.26)	3.52 (1.17)	3.97 (1.36)
Monthly income	\$750 (-)	\$451 (\$241)	\$665 (\$658)	\$579 (\$502)



Findings

Parents identified many commonly-addressed barriers and facilitators.

Traditional Barriers	Description	Example	% of References	% of Participants	% of Groups
Lack of time	Lack of time to complete the activities (e.g., due to work conflicts, other homework, etc.)	If I had more time, yeah, of course, I'd like to do all of those activities with her.	12.22%	59.52%	80.00%
Communication problem by teacher	Participant describes a breakdown in communication with the child's teacher that led to a reduction in their use of the GRS program in some way.	If they would have said, "This is how we'll know what he needs help in," there would have been... a more clearer communication.	11.58%	52.38%	70.00%
Lack of familiarity with GRS	Participant didn't know about GRS as a whole, or the specific GRS activity in question.	You had to know how to combine the extra paper with the book itself.	10.61%	52.38%	90.00%
Communication problem by GRS	Participant describes a breakdown in communication with GRS staff that led to a reduction in their use of the GRS program in some way.	Like she said, they don't tell us what type of meeting is it.	9.32%	42.86%	80.00%
Communication problem within family	There is a breakdown in the communication between members of the child's family (e.g., mom picks up child and GRS materials, but doesn't give to dad).	He won't tell me things about meetings here. He just comes straight in and straight out.	6.11%	42.86%	60.00%
Difficulty level	A mismatch between the difficulty level of the activity and the GRS child's needs OR the parent's ability level (either too hard or too easy). This includes issues with literacy.	Someone told me to keep working at it. If it's not easy for you, imagine the child.	3.86%	23.81%	50.00%
Lack of teacher support	Parent perceives that the GRS child's teacher doesn't support the GRS program or activities.	The last thing they wanna do is to spend extra time speaking to parents.	2.57%	23.81%	50.00%
Lack of technology	Participant lacks the technology or knowledge to engage in the activity in question, or isn't confident in his/her technological skills.	I used to have a computer, but it got messed up.	3.54%	21.43%	50.00%
Traditional Facilitators	Description	Example	% of References	% of Participants	% of Groups
Flexible options	Parents discuss how having flexible options and materials facilitates to do GRS activities.	It gave me options. If you only gave me the paper and the letter, that doesn't give me an option.	10.73%	38.10%	80.00%
Staff support for GRS	Participant discuss how staff support (e.g. in parent workshops or GRS night) facilitate doing GRS activities.	She has a lot of knowledge and she is very smart. And she took the time to explain to me how to do... certain activities with her when she doesn't stay focused.	9.76%	45.24%	70.00%
Physicality of materials	Participant describes the importance of the physical presence of a material (e.g., having the book actually open in front of them, needing paper reminders).	But don't forget paper. You can feel the pages. You turn the pages and you see it. And you use your hand.	4.39%	23.81%	60.00%

Parents also described barriers that do not fit with traditional theories but align with the behavioral perspective, and might affect decision-making capacity.

Bandwidth Barriers	Description	Example	% of References	% of Participants	% of Groups
Forgetting	Participant (or other caregiver) forgets about GRS activities or prepare the child for school.	They told me about this meeting, and I totally forgot about it.	7.72%	47.62%	80.00%
Lack of child interest	Participant discusses child's lack of interest in participating in GRS activities - the child doesn't want to do the activities for whatever reason.	He loses interest very fast with numbers.	6.43%	30.95%	70.00%
Play doesn't lead to learning	Participant doesn't see play activities as leading to learning or preparing the child for school.	I don't see him advance. Like I see him a little bit more into play than learning. In here.	4.82%	26.19%	60.00%
Lack of parent interest	Participant (or caregiver) lacks interest in participating in GRS activities - the parent doesn't want to do the activities for whatever reason.	I didn't use it. I used my own method.	3.86%	23.81%	60.00%
Media overuse	Participants discuss not wanting to use media (e.g. tablet, website) because of media overuse, or describe being overwhelmed by media. This can be parent's or child use.	But you gotta take them more a little bit away from the tablet because they stay too stuck on it.	2.89%	28.57%	60.00%
Repetition of activities or materials	Participant describes not doing an activity or using a material because of some kind of overlap in materials or activities (e.g., already completed that activity at school or at home, tablet overlaps with book).	I just kind of like do my own thing when I'm home with him. (Be)cause I don't want him to get bored. I don't want him to think, "Oh, well mom's doing this. Grandma's doing this. Everybody's trying to stick this book in my face."	2.57%	19.05%	60.00%
Other kids in house	Other children present in the home interfere with the caregiver's ability to engage in GRS activities or use GRS materials.	Sometimes my oldest will try to get into the book, because she like the activities, too. She's 11 years old. So I got to like peel her away from my baby's GRS book.	2.25%	19.05%	50.00%
Lack of confidence	Participant doesn't feel confident in their ability to complete the GRS activities.	When I first begin I was like, "I can't do this game. I'm not doing this."	1.93%	14.29%	40.00%
Borrower obligation	Participants don't use tablet (or other materials) because they are afraid of losing it, break it, or having to pay for it	I wanted to get the tablet, but I was like naw, (be)cause then I have to take it home, bring it back... And make sure he doesn't get it. And they start playing with it. I don't like nothing to be broken, so let me leave that part alone.	0.96%	9.52%	20.00%
Bandwidth Facilitators	Description	Example	% of References	% of Participants	% of Groups
Fun	Participant describes GRS activities as fun and engaging, or that the child enjoys doing them.	It's a fun way to teach them how to do it.	25.37%	59.52%	90.00%
Easy and right difficulty	Participant discussed the ease with which GRS activities can be implemented, or activities being at the right difficulty level.	And she loves those activities!... And she don't have any problems. They're easy. They're fun to do.	19.51%	73.81%	100.00%
Reminders	Participant references text/email/verbal reminders from GRS or from teacher.	It's helpful, you know, to get those reminders.	12.68%	47.62%	70.00%
Learning through play	Participant sees play activities as learning and/or preparing the child for school.	Because in the midst of playing they're learning.	9.27%	38.10%	80.00%
Hands-on learning activities	Participant discussed how GRS activities foster learning by using "hands-on" activities or using everyday activities.	Like I use cookies or beans or something for her to add up and take away.	3.90%	26.19%	60.00%
Parent discussions/ learning/sharing	Participant discusses about the importance of learning from other parents and sharing experiences with others.	It's parents coming together, and learning more about the whole procedure of teaching your kid from pre-K to kindergarten.	3.90%	16.67%	30.00%

Parents also noted the helpfulness of text and phone reminders in attending GRS events, particularly the high engagers.

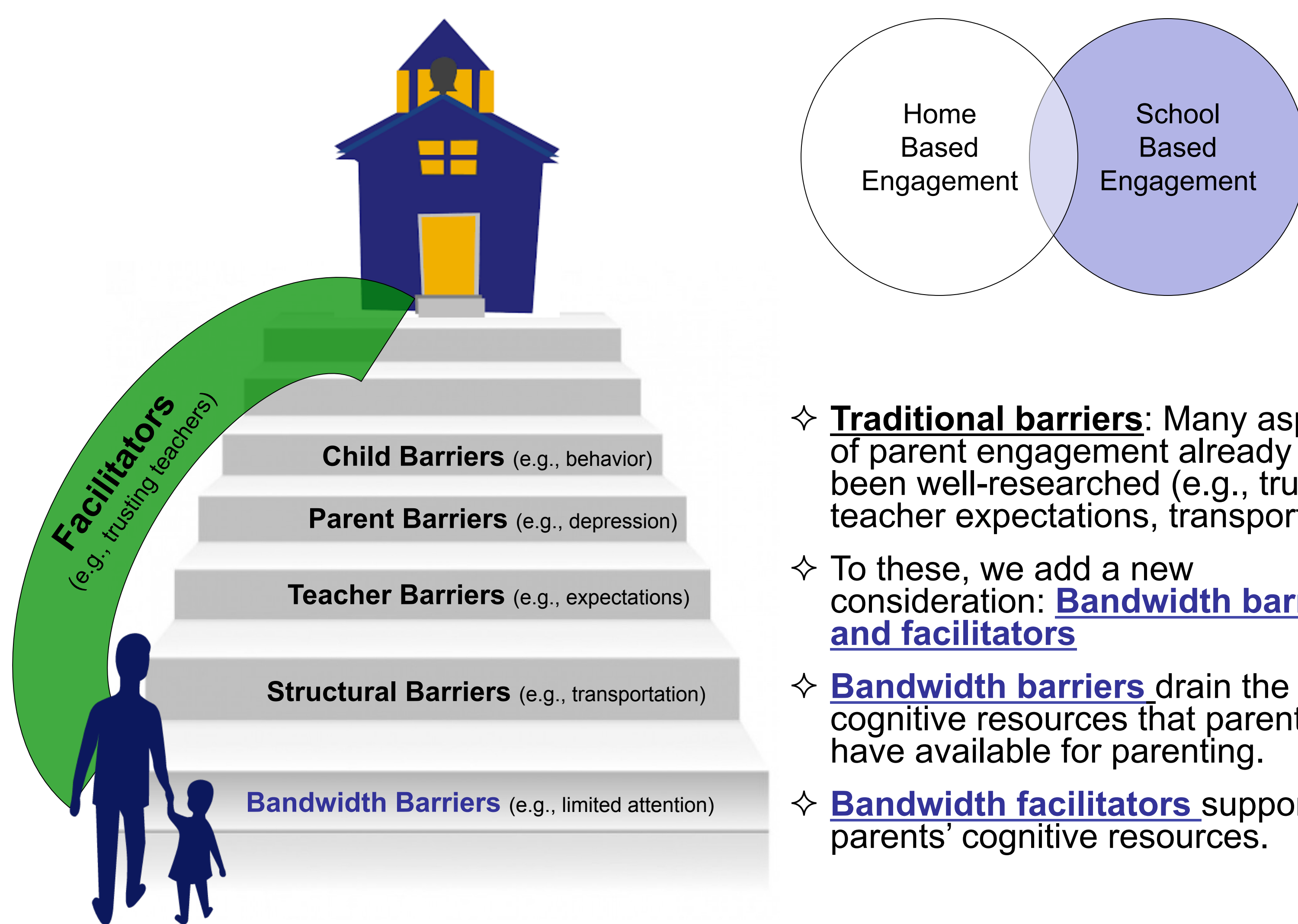
Conclusions & Next Steps

- Parents identified many typical barriers to their engagement with GRS that are documented in prior research.
- However, our work also uncovered new information about parent barriers and facilitators that appears to fit with hypotheses regarding cognitive bandwidth emerging from the behavioral economic framework.
- Barriers and facilitators were similar across language groups and engagement levels.
- The insights from this work are being used to design and experimentally test **behavioral economic enhancements** to GRS and assess impact on parent participation, children's time spent on GRS activities outside of the classroom, and children's developmental outcomes.

Parent Engagement

Parent engagement is:

- ✦ A partnership-based approach to working with families in ways that foster their involvement in their children's education
- ✦ A crucial component of children's academic success.



- ✦ **Traditional barriers:** Many aspects of parent engagement already have been well-researched (e.g., trust, teacher expectations, transportation)
- ✦ To these, we add a new consideration: **Bandwidth barriers and facilitators**
- ✦ **Bandwidth barriers** drain the cognitive resources that parents have available for parenting.
- ✦ **Bandwidth facilitators** support parents' cognitive resources.

Methods

FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES

- ✦ Participants were recruited via flyers left in all cubbies, and sign-up sheets in each classroom. Targeted efforts were made to recruit parents who were not attending GRS events.
- ✦ Focus groups were held at the centers, usually after school
- ✦ Separate groups for English-speaking (6) and Spanish-speaking (4) participants
- ✦ \$10 gift card as a thank-you for participation

TRANSCRIPTION & CODING

- ✦ Focus groups were transcribed from audio recordings by native speakers, and verified by proficient bilingual researchers
- ✦ Qualitative coding was completed in the language spoken using NVivo software
- ✦ Coding was guided by a Grounded Theory approach, using inductive open-coding procedures, alternating English and Spanish transcripts
- ✦ Code lists were modified by agreement until saturation was reached
- ✦ Reliability ranged from 65-85%

Research Questions

1. What barriers to – and facilitators of – program participation did parents identify?
2. How do the barriers and facilitators identified fit into a cognitive bandwidth framework informed by a behavioral economics perspective?
3. How do these barriers differ by different levels of parent engagement with the program?