

Facilitating Family Engagement Among California's Universal Transitional Kindergarten Program

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OVERVIEW

- Research consistently shows that parental involvement in a child's education has a positive impact on academic achievement, social-emotional development, and behavior throughout the K-12 years (Barger, Kim, Kuncel, & Pomerantz, 2019). However, little is known about how family engagement in preschool settings impacts young children's early learning.
- California's Universal Transitional Kindergarten (UTK) program aims to ensure every 4-year-old child – regardless of language, race, zip code, immigration status, or income level– has access to a quality learning experience the year before Kindergarten (California School Boards Association, 2022).
- Recognizing the potential of early childhood education to support long-term academic success and the increased access through California's UTK program, this poster aims to understand:

What school-initiated family engagement practices are currently being used in California's Universal Transitional Kindergarten programs, and which strategies are perceived by teachers as most effective?

METHODS

Data was collected from 143 UTK teachers across 45 school districts during the 2022-2023 school year. Findings presented represent preliminary data analysis.

Participants were recruited through the University of Maryland, College Park and University of California Berkeley's collaboration with the 21st Century California School Leadership Academy (21CSLA).

Gender Composition		Racial and Ethnic Composition	
Female	139	Caucasian/White	96
Male	3	Hispanic/Latino/a/e/Mexican	27
Non-Binary	1	Other	11
		Asian/Asian American	8
		Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1

Teachers were asked to share:

- Their perceptions and experiences with various family engagement strategies (e.g. encouraging parental participation, using families' preferred languages, and engaging in open, two-way communication);
- Their understanding of family needs and preferences, including the types of resources and information they provide to support children's learning at home.

Quantitative data was analyzed and family engagement strategies were categorized into two domains: resource provision and collaborative practices. A latent profile analysis was conducted to identify subgroups of teachers with similar patterns of perceived effectiveness ratings across engagement strategies.

A subset of 21 teachers also participated in qualitative interviews to further discuss family engagement activities. Interview transcripts were coded and a preliminary thematic analysis was conducted in Excel.

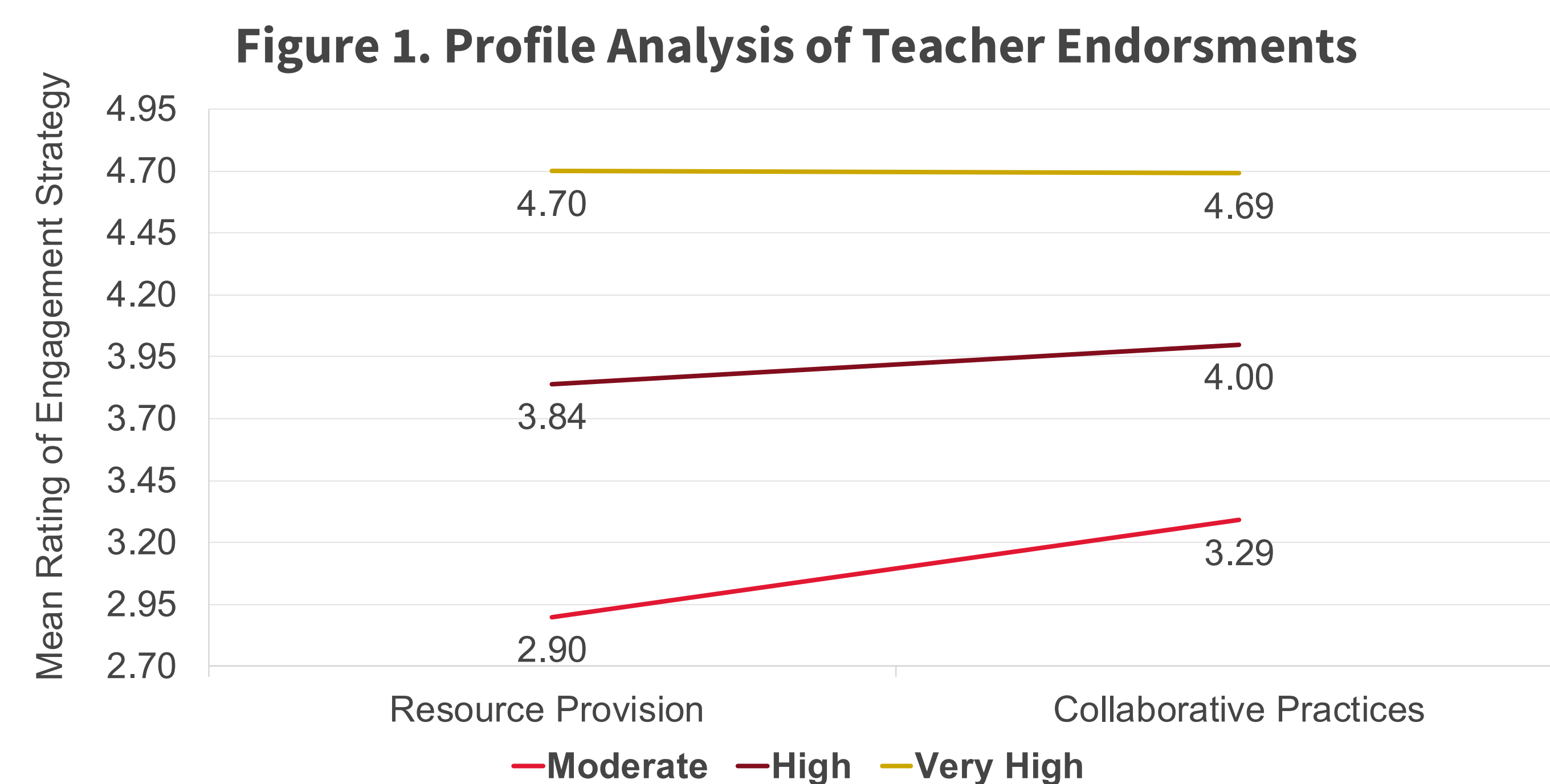


Table 1. Description of Profiles

	n (%)	Resource Provision	Collaborative Practices	Difference
Moderate Responders	37 (26.2%)	2.90	3.29	+ 0.39
High Responders	77 (53.8%)	3.84	4.00	+ 0.16
Very High Responders	29 (20.0%)	4.70	4.69	- 0.01

Select Qualitative Quotes

Barriers to Family Engagement

"I know with some of the demographics we have at my school **it's sometimes hard to get in touch with parents**. I think sometimes they see the school calling, and they think, "Oh, no! What did my child do?" So, I really try to make those positive calls home so that they aren't afraid to answer the phone.

"I feel like there should be an easier way to learn about family cultures so that I can be respectful to the culture, you know what I mean? Like, I can put questions on a survey. But then I'm just like, I feel like it's not deep enough. **Language is a problem, though**. Google Translate helps with that sometimes. Or an interpreter, which is good."

Facilitators of Family Engagement

"*And I think one thing that we do that really helps, we keep our classroom open in the morning, and we invite parents to come in. **We invite the parents to come in in the morning and get their kids settled, help them with their morning work, spend a few minutes. I think they've gotten to get a glimpse of our teaching style that way and just spend extra time with their kids and their environment.***"

"*You know I'd always tell parents; you have a question [message] me anytime. Even if it's late at night if I'm up and I see I, I'll answer them you know. **You know and I think, because it is some of them, their first time experiencing the schools and it's not, you know they're not sure of things and that's okay.***"

RESULTS

- A latent profile analysis identified three subgroups of teachers that differed in their overall level of endorsement of engagement strategies: Moderate Responders, High Responders, and Very High Responders.
- Figure 1 and Table 1** illustrate that across all teacher subgroups, the collaborative practice strategies were rated slightly equal or more effective than resource provision strategies. Table 1 outlines the descriptive statistics of these subgroups.
 - Moderate Responders** (26.2%) reported relatively low endorsement of both strategy types with the greatest amount of variability in ratings (0.39).
 - High Responders** (53.8%) reported moderate endorsement with less variability.
 - Very High Responders** (20.0%) reported high endorsement across both domains with very little variability.
- Through qualitative analyses, teachers identified **barriers to resource provision engagement strategies** including caregivers' limited access to technology, language diversity, and lack of experience navigating the educational system or collaborating with teachers.
- Teachers also identified **facilitators of collaborative practices** including ensuring families had multiple school points of contact, clear parent volunteer opportunities, and frequent invitations for engagement.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this study suggest that UTK teachers prefer culturally responsive, collaborative engagement practices and feel these specific strategies are key to encouraging successful family-school engagement in the preschool setting.

Overall, teachers endorsed more **active** family engagement strategies as "highly-effective or effective" as compared to more passive strategies like "providing materials that incorporate family strengths and interests."

Teachers highlighted the **unique context of preschool classrooms** indicating that for some families, this is the first time parents are engaging with schools and that UTK educators may need to facilitate engagement more.

At the policy and practice levels, these findings underscore the importance of investing in culturally responsive, school-initiated family engagement supports in early childhood. **School psychologists play a key role in supporting teacher's use of these strategies and providing targeted consultation.**

Read the **Building Bridges: Family Engagement Approaches Among Transitional Kindergarten Teachers** research brief here:

