



# Behavioral Insights and Parenting Lab

## MAP4Parents Phase I

### THE CHALLENGE

Research shows that disadvantaged children arrive at kindergarten behind their more advantaged peers in indicators of school readiness and have difficulty catching up throughout their school years. Because family engagement is so important to improving child outcomes, Head Start and other publicly supported preschools are required to spend substantial funds promoting family engagement.

Parental engagement programs include family events, home visits and parent volunteer activities at the school. MAP4Parents sheds light on what these programs look like in the Head Start context, barriers to parent participation, and pilots a behaviorally informed intervention to increase participation.

### FINDINGS

#### WHAT WE LEARNED

There is a wide variety in preschool programming for families, and few parents in either the treatment or control group attended any event.

The treatment increased attendance by 1-2 events depending on the estimation model ( $p=.05$ ).

The results imply that parents place a relatively low value on attending the events.

#### CAVEATS

We need a more thorough assessment of what types of events parents are more likely to attend and how timing and preschool communication affects parent attendance. We need to learn whether parent attendance at events changes child outcomes in some way.

### THE RESEARCH

While all evidence suggests that family engagement is key to closing the achievement gap, family engagement activities offered in subsidized preschool programs have largely been unsuccessful in either increasing family engagement or improving school readiness. The MAP4Parents project aimed to gain insights into the following questions:

1. What are the barriers preventing parents from participating more fully in preschool family engagement programs?
2. Can the behavioral tools that have been used successfully to increase parent engagement in other domains increase parents' participation in preschool family engagement programs?

Answering these questions are a crucial step to helping Head Start programs improve parent participation in their family engagement programs. The MAP4Parents team will answer these questions by:

1. Interviewing and surveying parents in Head Start programs to better understand why parents do not fully participate in current parent engagement programming offered at their child's preschool
2. Implementing a 17-week pilot intervention of a behaviorally informed program to increase participation in family engagement activities offered by preschools

# MAP4Parents Phase I

## WHO WE ARE

**The Behavioral Insights and Parenting Lab** at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy studies the science of parental decision-making especially through the lens of behavioral science. Parents are the single greatest influence on children. Parents' investments and engagement in their children's development drives children's skill acquisition and varies greatly by family background. Disadvantaged children are at particular risk for entering kindergarten behind their more advantaged peers, setting up an achievement gap that persists across the school years and into adulthood. Finding ways to support effective parent investment and engagement in children's development is key to closing this gap.

Research shows that a variety of low-cost, light-touch behavioral supports can optimize the decisions that people make in a number of key arenas of life, including decisions about health and financial savings. The BIP Lab is dedicated to understanding how such behavioral supports can be used to leverage parental investments to promote children's development in low-income families. The Lab was co-founded in 2014 by Professors Ariel Kalil and Susan Mayer.

## DIRECTORS

**Ariel Kalil, PhD**, is a professor at Harris Public Policy, where she also directs the Center for Human Potential and Public Policy. She is a developmental psychologist who studies economic conditions, parenting, and child development. In addition to her work at the BIP Lab, her current research examines the historical evolution of income-based gaps in parenting behavior and children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

**Susan E. Mayer, PhD**, is a professor and dean emeritus at Harris Public Policy. She has published numerous articles on the measurement of poverty, the effect of growing up in poor neighborhoods, and the effect of parental income on children's well-being. In addition to her work at the BIP Lab, she is engaged in a number of studies of intergenerational economic mobility.



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