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Supporting Family-School Partnerships in Rural Communities: Preliminary Results of a Randomized Trial¹

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Introduction

- Proportionally, a greater number of children living in rural areas experience mental health problems compared to children living in urban settings (Lenardson, Ziller, Lambert, Race & Yousefian, 2010).
- Families in rural communities face challenges accessing supports (DeLeon, Wakefield, & Hagglund, 2003).
- Parents and teachers are essential for meeting the needs of students in rural schools.
 - Rural parents have fewer interactions with their children and teachers about school compared to parents in other geographic areas (Prater, Bermudez, & Owens, 1997).
 - Teachers in rural schools often report feeling ill-equipped to provide services to students with behavior concerns (Monk, 2007).
 - Few studies are available that focus on building rural parents' and teachers' skills and capacities to collaboratively address students' mental health and behavioral concerns.
- *Conjoint Behavioral Consultation* (CBC; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008) is a family-school partnership intervention that addresses some of the barriers associated with access to services in rural settings.
- Decades of research have demonstrated the efficacy of CBC in diverse settings. The utility of CBC for *building competencies among rural parents and teachers* has not been investigated.
- The purpose of the study is to examine the *preliminary* effects of CBC on rural parents' and teachers' practices and beliefs immediately following the intervention and over time (one year post-CBC).

Method

Participants

- The present subsample is derived from the first three years of implementation of a four-year randomized controlled trial (RCT).
- Participants in the RCT included Kindergarten through 3rd grade students ($n=180$) and their parents and teachers ($n=105$) from schools in Midwestern rural communities.
- Teachers were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups, and all students within a classroom were assigned accordingly.

Procedure

- Within CBC, a consultant met with a teacher and the parents of 1 to 3 students for CBC meetings via a 4-stage process:
 - Needs Identification
 - Needs Analysis/Plan Development
 - Plan Implementation
 - Plan Evaluation

Measures

- Measures include:
 - Parent Teacher Relationship Scale (PTRS; Vickers & Minke, 1995)
 - Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Dadds, Maujean & Fraser, 2003)
 - Parent Efficacy for Helping the Child Succeed in School (PEHCSS; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005)
 - Participation in Problem Solving Scales (TPPS, PPS; Sheridan, 2004)

Analysis Plan

- Repeated measures *t*-tests evaluated change in scores from pre- to post-test.
- Multilevel modeling assessed longitudinal differences between treatment and control groups.

Results

- Results from *preliminary* analyses suggest promising effects of CBC for rural teachers and parents (see Tables 1 and 2).
- As a function of participation in the intervention, *parents in the CBC group* compared to parents in the control group demonstrated **significant decreases in their use of inconsistent discipline** strategies, and greater **improvements in positive parenting practices**, participation in **problem-solving**, the **relationship with their children's teachers**, and **beliefs that they can help children** be successful (see Table 1).
 - Over time (i.e., *during the intervention and 12 months following participation*), the parents who received CBC demonstrated a significantly greater positive rate of change

for the use **constructive parenting practices** compared to the parents in the control group (see Table 2).

- Compared to teachers in the control group, *teachers who participated in CBC* reported **greater involvement in problem-solving** procedures during their time in the intervention.

Discussion

- Preliminary results demonstrate CBC as a potential effective intervention for addressing the needs of parents and teachers in rural communities:
 - Rural parents receiving CBC reported greater engagement over time in their children’s education and improved parenting practices and self-efficacy.
 - Teachers in rural schools reported improvements in effective problem solving during participation in CBC.
- Limitations of the study include:
 - Data represent three years of a four-year randomized clinical trial. Full interpretation of results is not possible.
 - Only significant findings are presented in the current study.
 - Results are limited to one rural region.
- Future research is necessary to:
 - Discern unique characteristics of rural settings that impact the implementation and effects of CBC.
 - Determine the conditions under which CBC is most effective.
 - Examine the efficacy of CBC in “authentic” practice contexts.

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Table 1.

Significant Pre-Post Change Immediately Following CBC

Measure	<i>n</i>	Pre		Post		<i>t</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
PEHCSS	100	4.53	0.52	4.72	0.57	-3.32**
PPS	PPPS 99	4.23	0.82	5.00	0.54	-5.37**
	TPPS 101	3.97	0.83	5.37	1.01	2.35*
APQ	Positive Parenting 100	4.35	0.47	4.40	.46	-2.00*
	Inconsistent Discipline 100	2.00	.052	1.83	0.47	2.07*
PTRS-Parent Report	100	4.29	0.64	4.51	0.51	-3.01**
	Joining 100	4.43	0.60	4.57	0.51	-2.43*
Communication-to-Other	100	3.95	0.93	4.35	0.66	-2.92**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 2.

Significant Long-Term Outcomes

Effect	Est.	SE	DF	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<u>APQ: Positive Parenting</u>					
Intercept	4.35	0.05	69	95.76	<.01
Time	0.05	0.20	248	2.31	0.02
Group	0.08	0.07	248	1.11	0.27
Time*Group	-0.06	0.03	248	-2.04	0.04
<u>APQ: Inconsistent Discipline</u>					
Intercept	2.00	0.05	69	40.54	<.01
Time	-0.11	0.02	248	-5.50	<.01
Group	-0.09	0.08	248	-1.17	0.24
Time*Group	0.11	0.03	248	3.51	<.01