

Combining Financial Incentives with Behavioral Tools to Increase Preschool Parent Engagement

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Motivation

Parental engagement is a crucial part of many preschool programs.

- Longstanding belief that preschools should engage both the child and their parent (Two-Generation Approach).
- Head Start centers are required to spend substantial funds on family engagement, and other programs have followed suite.

However, parental attendance at these events is staggeringly low.

- No administrative data on parental attendance.
- Studies estimate the attendance rate as less than 20% (Gennetian et al., 2019; Mendez, 2010; Marti et al. 2018)

Research Question: To what extent can **incentives** and **reminders** be used to increase parental engagement with preschools?

Similar Studies:

- Two recent RCTs (Gennetian et al. 2019; Hill et al. 2020) used reminders bundled with other behavioral nudges, and found no significant impact on parent attendance.
- One recent study used financial incentives, and found significant impact on attendance (Fryer et al. 2015).

Intervention: Map 4 Parents

Map4Parents: 17-week attendance intervention

- RCT across 6 low-income preschools in Chicago
 - Opt-out design among parents of 3-4 year olds
 - Randomized at the family level, stratified by center
- Sample Size of 319 (159 control, 160 treatment)
- We tracked attendance for 8 events at each school

Intervention included:

- **Text Reminders** Weekly reminder of event(s) that week
- **Incentives** Parents given \$25 for attending each event
 - Incentive was framed using **Loss Aversion**

Treatment Texts

- **Friday 6 pm Text:** Your M4P balance is [BALANCE] as of 6pm on [DATE]. Remember you started with 200 and lose 25 for every M4P event you miss.
- **Sunday 6 pm Text:** Plan to go to and sign in at [SITE]'s M4P event this week. You or another adult who cares for [Child Name] may go. [TEXT 2] [EVENT NAME] is on [DAY OF THE WEEK] [DATE] at [TIME]. Mark your calendar!

Descriptive Statistics and Balance

Table: Descriptive Statistics and Balance

	Control			Treatment			Diff
	n	mean	sd	n	mean	sd	
Female	159	0.51	0.50	160	0.50	0.50	-0.009
Spanish	159	0.22	0.42	160	0.24	0.43	0.024
Child's Age	159	4.18	0.63	160	4.08	0.61	-0.01

Note: Child's age as of November 2018.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Total Events Attended

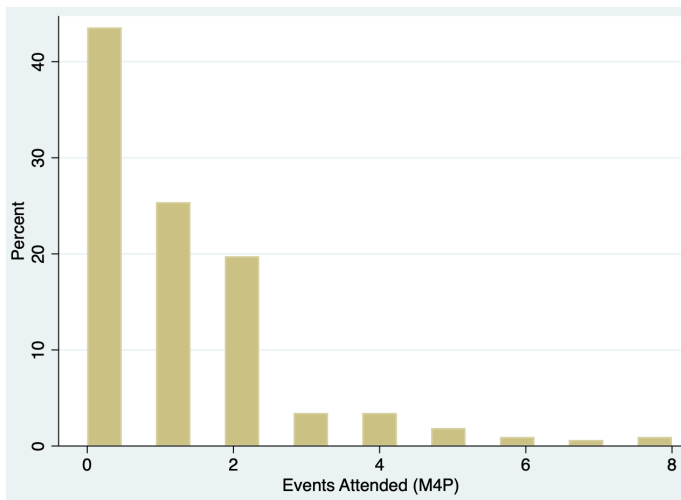


Figure: Distribution of Total Events Attended

Attendance by Event Type

Event Type	Attendance Rate	N
Parent-Child Events	21.8%	191
Parenting Skills	13.1%	213
Parent Meeting	11.8%	165
Parent Development	4.5%	224
BIP Hosted	3.8%	135

Figure: Attendance Rate by Event Type

Impact of Treatment on Attendance Rate

	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2
Treatment	0.0361* (0.0195)	0.0356* (0.0195)
Observations	319	319
R-squared	0.174	0.189
Center FE	Yes	Yes
Covariates	No	Yes

Note: Standard Errors are in parenthesis. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.
Control group attendance rate is **0.128**.

Alternative Dependent Variables

	(1) Rate	(2) At Least 1	(3) At Least 2	(4) At Least 3
Treatment	0.0356* (0.0195)	-0.0135 (0.0494)	0.0541 (0.0478)	0.0741** (0.0346)
Observations	319	319	319	319
R-squared	0.189	0.239	0.183	0.086
Center FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Covariates	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard Errors are in parenthesis. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Heterogeneity and Spillovers

Heterogeneity:

- Treatment Effect ranges from 3 to 6 percentage points depending on the event type, but not significantly different.
- Treatment effect is approximately the same for morning, afternoon, and evening events.

Spillovers:

- 4 of the centers put on more than 8 events during this time window, and we measured attendance at 7 of these events.
- Treatment parents were significantly more likely (13% versus 26%) to attend non-incentivized events than control parents.

Conclusion

- Modest incentives can help increase parental attendance, but only for a small fraction of parents.
- Low attendance rates overall may imply parents have a low expected benefit from event types currently offered by centers.