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Project Title: Building Bridges: A Brief School Readiness Intervention Designed to Guide Families Transitioning from Early Head Start to Head Start

Mentor: Dr. Katie Hart

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Project Abstract:

There are well-established cognitive, social, and emotional skills that are necessary for children to enter school ready to learn. These school readiness skills serve as the foundation for future success, both socially and academically. The transition into these early school years signifies an important developmental milestone, which lays the groundwork for later school success. Parent involvement in children's development and early learning experiences has been widely examined and identified as a strong predictor of children's school readiness. Therefore, promoting positive parent involvement during the early school years and during developmental transitions is key to children's later school success.

Recognizing the importance of early school success, a number of educational initiatives and programs have been developed to promote best practices to support children and families in their transition to school. The majority have focused specifically on supporting the transition to kindergarten. However, as early as preschool, a number of children display significant behavioral and academic difficulties, which places them at risk for later school failure. Specifically, young children from low-income and ethnic minority families, are at an increased risk for behavioral and academic problems. In Head Start (HS), it is estimated that between 15% and 40% of children are at risk for these difficulties. The fact that children's school readiness skills, especially academic achievement, remain relatively stable after the first years of school underscores the importance of intervening earlier, before problems arise. Since parents play a leading role in children's early learning and development, enhancing skills and supports for parents in promoting school readiness in young children during earlier transitions to school may bolster later school readiness.

Therefore the proposed project objectives are to: (1) Adapt a school readiness parenting program, the School Readiness Parenting Program (SRPP), to support families transitioning from Early Head Start (EHS) to HS; (2) Investigate the acceptability and feasibility of the adapted SRPP (i.e., SRPP-BRIDGE); and (3) Evaluate the initial efficacy of SRPP-BRIDGE in improving parental involvement, positive parenting skills, and children's academic and social-emotional outcomes in the transition to HS compared to an active comparison group. The study will use a randomized design (n=60; 30 families assigned to each condition) with structured observations and assessments (pre-intervention, post-intervention, and 6-month follow-up). Parent participants will be included in the study if: a) their child is transitioning out of EHS, b) they plan to enroll their child in HS preschool, and c) they can commit to weekly 2-hr sessions over the course of four-weeks during the summer transition to HS. The findings from the proposed project will ultimately help to inform best practices for supporting families in their transition from EHS to HS.